

Editors' Introduction

The Other Voice

Few forms of writing are as closely associated with women and femininity as the fairy tale. The best known fairy-tale characters are women, of course—Beauty, Cinderella, Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White. But in a more important sense, a deeply rooted stereotype in Western and many other cultures holds that women and girls are the primary tellers and audience for these stories. Scenes of mothers, grandmothers, nursemaids, and governesses reading or telling tales to children, chiefly girls, are recurrent in the iconography depicting storytelling.¹ Even if such images tell only part of the story—men and boys have read, told, and watched fairy tales as well, after all—the focus on women and girls has been central to conceptions about the genre. In the commercial arena, for instance, the Walt Disney Company's (in)famous versions of fairy tales have promoted gender roles and notions of romantic love that have been widely denounced by feminist critics.² In a well-known exchange about the value of fairy tales for girls and young women in the early 1970s, Marcia Lieberman's and Alison Lurie's divergent visions of the genre (Lieberman rejecting it, Lurie defending it) nonetheless converged around the deleterious effects of Disney fairy-tale films.³ In fact, more progressive uses of the

1. See Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995).

2. There is a vast literature on this topic. See especially Amy M. Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Publishers, 2006); Deborah Ross, "Escape from Wonderland: Disney and the Female Imagination," *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 18:1 (2004), 53–66; Susan Hines, introduction to *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom* by Brenda Ayres, ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds., *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

3. See Alison Lurie, "Fairy Tale Liberation," *New York Review of Books* (December 17, 1970): 42–44, and Marcia Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale," *College English* 34 (1972): 383–95. For a review of feminist debates about the fairy tale and the rise of feminist critical discourse about the genre, see

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association of women and girls with the fairy tale were inspired by the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Texts transformed stereotypically passive princesses into active heroines and cast doubt on the happiness assured by the seemingly obligatory final marriage.⁴ And in literature for English-speaking adults, works by Margaret Atwood, A. S. Byatt, Olga Broumas, Angela Carter, Emma Donoghue, Anne Sexton, and Jane Yolen (among others) attest to the continued resonance the genre holds for women writers.⁵

Associations of the fairy tale with women reach back at least to the prophetic storytelling powers of the sibyls in Greek and Roman legend and the old woman who tells the earliest known version of "Beauty and the Beast" ("Psyche and Cupid") in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (second century CE). Throughout medieval and early modern Europe, oral storytelling was linked to the preeminently female craft of spinning, and the two were regularly depicted together in iconography.⁶ In many European languages, the seemingly timeless identi-

Donald Haase, "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship," in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, ed. Donald Haase (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 1–36.

4. See the selection of tales in Jack Zipes, ed., *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (New York: Methuen, 1986), and, on recent feminist fairy tales, Jack Zipes, *Relentless Progress: The Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 121–39.

5. See, among others, Margaret Atwood, *Bluebeard's Egg* (1983); Francesca Lia Block, *The Rose and the Beast* (2000); Olga Broumas, *Beginning with O* (1977); A. J. Byatt, *Possession* (1990); Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979); Emma Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (1997); Sara Maitland, *Far North and Other Dark Tales* (2008); Anne Sexton, *Transformations* (1971); Terri Windling, *The Fairy Tale Series* (Tor Books); and Jane Yolen, *Once Upon a Time She Said* (2005). On fairy tales by contemporary women writers, see especially, Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon a Tale: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jessica Tiflin, *Marvelous Geometries: Narrative and Metafiction in the Modern Fairy Tale* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), and essays in Stephen Benson, ed., *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008).

6. Perhaps the most famous is the frontispiece of Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (*Stories or Tales of Yesteryear*, 1697). See figure 3. On spinning and tale-telling, see Ruth B. Bottigheimer, "Tale Spinners: Submerged Voices in Grimms' Fairy Tale," *New German Critique: An Interdisciplinary Journal of German Studies* 27 (Fall 1982): 141–50;

fictionation of women with folk- and fairy tales is inscribed in the terms commonly used for these stories: *old wives' tales* and *mother goose tales* in English, *contes de vieille* and *contes de ma mère l'oye* in French, *Ammenmärchen* in German, *cuentos de viejas* in Spanish. Contrary to the vagueness of such expressions, a precise genealogy of this association can be uncovered in neglected recesses of literary history. If the names of Charles Perrault (1628–1703), the Brothers Grimm (Jacob [1785–1863] and Wilhelm [1786–1859]), and Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) are synonymous with the fairy tale, a comparatively less well known group of seventeenth-century French women writers, now called the *conteuses* (female storytellers), defined much of what we currently understand to be fairy tales: stories modeled on folktales, with one or two protagonists, magical elements, and a (usually) happy ending.⁷ In fact, the term “fairy tale” in English is derived from an early eighteenth-century translation of the title of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's first collection, *Les contes des fées* (1697–98) and published as *Tales of the Fairies* in 1707.⁸

The turn of the eighteenth century in France witnessed the birth of the *conte de fées*, a genre that quickly became a literary phenomenon. Between 1690 and 1709, nearly two-thirds of the fairy tales published in France were authored by the *conteuses*:⁹ Marie-

and Karen E. Rowe, “To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale,” in *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 53–74.

7. On the definition of the literary fairy tale, see Jack Zipes, ed., “Introduction: Towards a Definition of the Literary Fairy Tale,” in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xv–xxxii, and “Fairy Tale,” in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, ed. Donald Haase, 3 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 1:322–25.

8. See Gabrielle Verdier, “De Ma Mère l'Oye à Mother Goose: La fortune des contes de fées littéraires français en Angleterre,” in *Contacts culturels et échanges linguistiques au XVIIe siècle en France* (Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1997), 185–202. See also Nancy B. Palmer and Melvin D. Palmer, “The French *conte de fées* in England,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 35–44; and Nancy B. Palmer and Melvin D. Palmer, “English Editions of French contes de fées in England,” *Studies in Bibliography* 27 (1974): 227–32.

9. See the Appendix at the end of this volume for a full list of the fairy tales by the *conteuses*, with the original French titles and English translations. We cite our own English translations throughout. The Appendix is based on the “Index des titres de contes (1690–1709)” for

Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, baronne d'Aulnoy (c. 1650–1705), Louise d'Auneuil (?–c. 1700), Catherine Bédacier, née Durand (c. 1650–c. 1715), Catherine Bernard (c. 1663–1712), Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force (c. 1650–1724), Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier de Villandon (1664–1734), and Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, comtesse de Murat (c. 1668–1716). Although less productive overall, men, too, published *contes de fées*, including Jean-Paul Bignon (1662–1743), François-Timoléon de Choisy (1644–1724), François de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715), Eustache Le Noble (1643–1711), Jean de Mailly (?–1724), Jean Nodot (?), and Jean de Préchac (1676–?). But the most celebrated male author, whose fairy tales gradually eclipsed those of all the other writers at this time, was Charles Perrault. By the nineteenth century, his “Mother Goose Tales,” as the eight prose tales of *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités* (*Stories or Tales of Yesteryear, with Moral Lessons*, 1697) came to be known, were taken as the standard to which others—and particularly those by the *conteuses*—were compared, always unfavorably.¹⁰ Critics have often assumed that Perrault created the genre of the *conte de fées* in France, and that all authors attempted to imitate him.¹¹ But, in fact, Perrault and the *con-*

the recent critical edition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French fairy tales (Bibliothèque des Génies et des Fées [Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004–]); sixty-eight of these 112 *contes de fées* were written by women, forty-one by men, and three remain anonymous. See Nathalie Rizzoni and Julie Boch, eds., *L'âge d'or du conte de fées: De la comédie à la critique* (1690–1709), Bibliothèque des Génies et des Fées, vol. 5 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), 613–16.

10. A manuscript of the *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, currently in the collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, dates from 1695 (see Charles Perrault, *Perrault's Tales of Mother Goose: The Dedication Manuscript Reproduced in Collotype Facsimile with Introduction and Critical Text*, ed. Jacques Barchilon [New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1956], 2 vols.). Before this date, Perrault had published separately, and then as a collection (1694), three verse tales: *Griselidis*, *Peau d'âne*, and *Les souhaits ridicules* (*Griselda*, *Donkey-skin*, and *The Ridiculous Wishes*). Although he acknowledged authorship of the verse tales, he never did so for the prose tales, and instead the dedicatory epistle is signed, “[P]ierre] Darmancour,” the name of his son. Scholars continue to debate whether Perrault was indeed the author of this collection, whether he collaborated with his son, or whether the attribution to Darmancour was a subterfuge. For a succinct summary of these debates, see Marc Escola, *Contes de Charles Perrault*, Foliothèque (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 62–69.

11. Typical is the statement by Jean-Pierre Collinet that “the women who continued and emulated Perrault's example are not always able to protect themselves as well as he was

teuses developed two divergent models for the genre at more or less the same time. The *conteuses* never imitated the style, tone, or subject matter of the *Stories or Tales of Yesteryear*, and more important, it was the female authors who exemplified the *conte de fées* from the late seventeenth century until the Revolution. Their corpus was both imitated and parodied by the numerous writers who published fairy tales during the genre's second vogue, in eighteenth-century France.¹² Through translations and reprintings in chapbooks and children's literature, the *conteuses* continued to exert an influence on the development of the fairy tale in Germany, England, and North America, even if literary history has only recently begun to acknowledge this debt.¹³ To reread the often neglected tales of the *conteuses* is both to restore them to their rightful place in literary history and to reassess their role in the cultural associations of women with the fairy tale.

Contexts: Cultural and Literary

From all indications, the *conte de fées* emerged from parlor games both at court and in the salons of mid-seventeenth-century France. In her correspondence, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné (1626–1696), alludes to what are clearly fairy tales told at court when

against the abuse of facile wonders" (Jean-Pierre Collinet, "Préface," in *Contes*, by Charles Perrault, ed. Jean-Pierre Collinet, Folio, vol. 1281 [Paris: Gallimard, 1981], 34). All translations of primary and secondary references are our own, unless otherwise noted.

12. See especially Raymonde Robert, *Le conte de fées littéraire en France de la fin du XVIIe siècle à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1982), and Jean-Paul Sermain, *Le conte de fées du classicisme aux Lumières*, L'Esprit des Lettres (Paris: Editions Desjonquères, 2005). The writers of the eighteenth-century vogue include: Paul Baret, Jean-François de Bastide, Louis de Boissy, Antoine Bret, Anne-Claude-Philippe de Caylus, Jacques Cazotte, François-Antoine Chevrier, Claude-Prosper de Crébillon, Denis Diderot, la présidente Dreuillet, Charles Duclot, Marie-Antoinette Fagnan, Marianne-Agnès Falques, Louis-Charles Fougeret de Monbron, Antoine Gautier de Montdorge, Madeleine-Angélique de Gomez, Thomas-Simon Gueullette, Antoine Hamilton, le Chevalier de La Morlière, la marquise de Lassay, Marie-Jeanne Le Prince de Beaumont, Louise Levesque, Catherine de Lintot, Mademoiselle de Lubert, Marguerite de Lussan, François-Augustin de Moncrif, Henri Pajon, Nicolas-Edme Rétif de la Bretonne, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Hyacinthe de Saint-Hyacinthe, Henri-Charles de Senneterre, Carl-Gustav Tessin, Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve, and Claude-Henri de Voisenon.

13. See the section of this introduction titled "Reception: Disfavor and Favor."

she describes women there being entertained (*mitonnées*) with long and intricate narratives derived from simple folk-tale like plots.¹⁴ Although there is little direct evidence, oral storytelling doubtless occurred in Parisian salons as well, since the salons' documented activities included games that bore striking resemblance to elements of fairy tales, such as the "game of metamorphoses" described by La Force.¹⁵ Under the auspices of prominent women, the salons had served as a springboard for many literary genres, most notably the novel, which was championed by women writers.¹⁶ Most of the *conteuses* likely were members of prominent salons and knew each other through these circles.¹⁷

If women were at the forefront of efforts to create what was a new genre in late seventeenth-century France, *why* and *how* did they do so? Although motivations and intentions are problematic as the basis for critical interpretations, these questions can still shed light on the significance of the *conteuses'* fairy tales within the context of their time. Several of the *conteuses* were considered to be what Joan DeJean has called "scandalous women" of the period.¹⁸ D'Aulnoy was accused of plotting to have her husband charged with a capital crime; La Force

14. See her letters of October 30, 1656, and August 6, 1677 (Marie de Rabutin-Chantal de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. Roger Duchêne, 3 vols. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade [Paris: Gallimard, 1972–78], 1:40–42; 2: 515–17). Lexicographer Antoine Furetière defines the verb "mitonner" as "complimenting, pampering someone, treating a person favorably in order to win or keep that person's good graces" (*Dictionnaire universel*, reprint, 1690 [Marsanne: Redon, 1999], CD-ROM).

15. Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force, *Les jeux d'esprit ou la promenade de la princesse de Conti à Eu par Mademoiselle de la Force*, ed. M. le marquis de la Grange (Paris: Auguste Aubry, 1862).

16. See especially Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Linda Timmermans, *L'accès des femmes à la culture (1598–1715): Un débat d'idées de Saint François de Sales à la Marquise de Lambert* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1993); Myriam Maître, *Les précieuses: Naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle*, *Lumière Classique*, vol. 25 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), and Faith E. Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

17. There is some evidence that d'Aulnoy, La Force, L'Héritier, and Murat attended the same salons. See Renate Baader, *Dames de lettres: Autorinnen des präziösen, hocharistokratischen und "modernen" Salons (1649–1698): Mlle de Scudéry, Mlle de Montpensier, Mme d'Aulnoy*, *Romanistische Abhandlungen* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986), 229.

18. See DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 127–58.

was banished from court for “impious” poems; and Murat was imprisoned for political subversion and tribadism (the early-modern term for lesbianism).¹⁹ Not surprisingly, then, early literary historians saw in their fairy tales the escapist desire of scandalous women to retreat into the supposed comfort of innocent fantasy.²⁰ And yet, apart from these three writers, the other *conteuses* and *conteurs* were not particularly controversial figures, and in any event, readers at the time do not seem to have been interested in viewing their fairy tales through the lens of biographical details or rumors.

More compelling by far is a self-awareness as women writers that the *conteuses* display in their tales. Dedicating stories to each other and alluding to the other *conteuses*, they frame their *contes de fées* as a new genre created and dominated by women.²¹ Although this framing may be evidence of a group consciousness, it is not necessarily proof of collective solidarity. Murat, for instance, contends her tales are just as original as those of the “ladies who have written in this genre until now.”²² And L’Héritier, while celebrating her bond of friendship with Murat, nonetheless foregrounds her own particular storytelling. “You [Murat] write the prettiest verse novellas in the world, in verse as refined as it is natural,” L’Héritier states at the beginning of her tale, *The Clever Princess*. “But I would very much like to tell you one in turn, charming Countess... My little story provides a proper moral and can thus appeal to you.”²³ For all the evidence of a group consciousness,

19. Mary Elizabeth Storer, *Un épisode littéraire de la fin du XVII^e siècle: La mode des contes de fées (1685–1700)* (1928; repr., Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1972) remains a useful starting point for biographical information about the *conteuses*. See also the biographies in *The Teller’s Tale: Lives of the Classic Storytellers*, ed. Sophie Raynard (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming). On Murat, see also David M. Robinson, *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature: Classical, Early Modern, Eighteenth Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 26–34.

20. This is especially true of Storer’s study (see, for instance, Storer, *Un épisode littéraire*, 253).

21. For instance, L’Héritier dedicates her tale, *The Clever Princess*, to Murat. In addition to dedicating her volume, *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*, to the “modern fairies” (by which she means the *conteuses*), Murat makes a complimentary reference to d’Aulnoy and her tale *Princess Little Carp* in *Little Eel* (see *Little Eel*, n442, in this volume).

22. *Avertissement* in Henriette-Julie de Castelnau de Murat, *Contes*, ed. Geneviève Patard, Bibliothèque des Génies et des Fées, vol. 3 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), 200.

23. Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier de Villandon, Catherine Bernard, Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force, Catherine Bédacier Durand, and Louise Bossigny d’Auneuil, *Contes*, ed.

then, the *conteuses* also used their tales to promote themselves as individuals within a growing literary field.²⁴

Women's predilection for the fairy tale in this period should be understood in a broader social and cultural context. The final decade of the seventeenth century was marked by severe hardship, caused by repeated crop failures, widespread famine, epidemics, and disastrous military campaigns by Louis XIV (1638–1715, r. 1643–1715).²⁵ Against this backdrop, the *contes de fées* as a whole—by both women and men—indeed do seem to represent something of an escapist fantasy. But the religiosity of the final years of Louis XIV's reign provides a sharper lens for the sociocultural specificity of the *conteuses'* fairy tales. Along with his morganatic wife, Françoise d'Aubigné, duchesse de Maintenon (1636–1719), the king enforced strict piety at court, emboldening ecclesiastical figures to attack what they saw as the worldliness of fashionable society. For these religious critics, literature was a prominent expression of the moral decadence of society, and virulent assaults were mounted against novels and plays in the years immediately preceding the appearance of the *conte de fées*.²⁶ However, only a few of these critics bothered to condemn the new genre—and even then, usually just in passing.

Nonetheless, in the context of a pietistic *fin de siècle*, the fairy tale constituted a defense of fashionable secular society. Its portrayal of earthly luxury and happiness and its reliance on the supernatural powers of fairies, sorcerers, and other “pagan” figures obviously run counter to a Christian world view. And yet, as a narrative form associated with children and the lower classes and championed largely

Raymonde Robert, *Bibliothèque des Génies et des Fées*, vol. 2 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 93.

24. See Patricia Hannon, *Fabulous Identities: Women's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France*, Faux Titre, vol. 151 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998). On the notion of the “literary field” and its relevance to seventeenth-century France, see Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique*, Le Sens Commun (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1985).

25. See Joël Cornette, *Chronique du règne de Louis XIV* (Paris: SEDES, 1997), 379–442. On the representation of social and political realities in the *contes de fées*, see especially Robert, *Le conte de fées littéraire*, 225–82, 327–79.

26. See Lewis C. Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France, 1690–1715: Nostalgic Utopias*, Cambridge Studies in French, vol. 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 69–71.

by women writers, this defense of secular culture appeared largely innocuous, at least if the lack of extended critiques is taken as any indication. Still, the unsettled political and social climate of the time partially explains the appeal of the genre. Fairy tales have often appeared in periods of social repression or crisis (for example, Victorian England, the “decadent” period of late nineteenth-century France, and Weimar Germany), and their particular brand of fantasy has been understood not only as escapism but also as critique.²⁷ Both explanations have been applied to the work of the *conteuses*, who belonged to the fashionable secular society of their time.²⁸

This secularism did not preclude the *conteuses*—or the *conteurs*—from attributing ethical value to their stories. What Perrault claimed for his verse tales—that they all contained “a praiseworthy and instructive moral”²⁹—was, on the surface, applicable to the entire vogue. A character in d’Aulnoy’s frame narrative, *Dom Gabriel Ponce de Leon* (1698), calls for “a bit of a moral” when she prescribes rules for stories.³⁰ Within the literary conventions of the period, this was in no way unusual, and many writers appended final morals, while most others dotted their texts with maxims.³¹ Yet, these explicitly stated “lessons” are often at odds with the logic of the narrative as a whole. At the end of La Force’s *The Enchanter*, the versed moral beings by claiming that both vice and honor lead to happiness; yet the

27. On Victorian English fairy tales, see U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *Ventures Into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); on the “decadent” fairy tale in *fin-de-siècle* France, see Jean de Palacio, *Les perversions du merveilleux: Ma Mère l’Oye au tournant du siècle* (Paris: Séguier, 1993); and on German fairy tales during the Weimar Republic, see Jack Zipes, ed., *Fairy Tales and Fables from Weimar Days* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989).

28. See Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender*, 59–97.

29. Charles Perrault, François de la Mothe-Fénelon, Louis de Mailly, Jean de Préchac, and François-Timoléon de Choisy, *Contes merveilleux*, ed. Tony Gheeraert, Bibliothèque des Génies et des Fées, vol. 4 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 105.

30. *Contes des fées, suivis des contes nouveaux ou les fées à la mode*, ed. Nadine Jasmin, Bibliothèque des Génies et des Fées, vol. 1 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 438.

31. Among the tales anthologized here, final morals are found in d’Aulnoy’s *Princess Little Carp* and *The Doe in the Woods*, La Force’s *Green and Blue* and *The Enchanter*, and L’Héritier’s *Marmoisan*. All the tales in this collection contain maxims. On maxims or the general propositions known as *sentences*, see *Prince Rosebush*, n25, in this volume.

end of the poem calls out more conventionally to the deity “Fortune” to “crush the wicked with eternal travails” and to “give the virtuous sweetest happiness.”³² This conclusion also contradicts the plot, in which neither kidnapping nor attempted patricide is punished. To be sure, La Force’s tale is an extreme case. But fairy tales by both men and women (most prominently, Perrault’s prose tales) privilege “pleasure” and question the “useful instruction” such tales might provide, or in the classic formula, they favor *dulce* over *utile*.³³ However, whenever seventeenth-century critics denounced the new genre as lacking in didactic value, they singled out the *conteuses* as the culprits. Thus, Abbé Pierre de Villiers (1648–1728), who expresses his admiration for Perrault’s tales, nonetheless opines: “if those [women] who undertook to compose them had remembered that fairy tales were created only to formulate an important moral and give it a concrete form we would not have considered them the lot of women and of ignorant men.”³⁴ Ultimately, the misogynistic reasoning used by Villiers here exposes a refusal to allow women, *as* women, to formulate “an important moral.” That privilege, so Villiers seems to believe, can only be exercised by men such as Perrault, to whom he credits “the best tales we have.”³⁵

Paradoxically, although women writers promoted morals and maxims, they also framed the fairy tale as trivial entertainment, worthy of ironic amusement. This is apparent in the word *bagatelle* (trifle), frequently used by the *conteuses* to characterize their fairy tales. Mélanie, one of the characters in d’Aulnoy’s frame story, *Dom Gabriel Ponce de Leon* (1698), draws out the substantive and tonal consequences of this notion for the *contes de fées* that would be recited among her friends: “They shouldn’t be either bombastic or crude; they should occupy a middle ground that is more lighthearted than serious; they need to have a bit of a moral; and above all, they should be offered as a trifle [*bagatelle*] whose worth the listener alone has the right to determine.”³⁶ By this standard, fairy tales, situated between

32. La Force, *The Enchanter*, 212, in this volume.

33. See Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender*, 51–58, and Sermain, *Le conte de fées*, 115–60.

34. Villiers, *Conversations on Fairy Tales*, 297, in this volume.

35. *Ibid.*, 309.

36. D’Aulnoy, *Contes des fées*, 438.

lofty and lowly extremes, were to serve a pleasurable function above all else.

But even as trivial entertainment, the fairy tale still allowed women writers to promote individual and collective interests.³⁷ As was typical of the fashionable and nobiliary elites of the time, the *conteuses* were eager to portray their writing as the product of a leisurely, aristocratic pastime instead of the commercial efforts of bourgeois authors. Describing the sociable gifts of d'Aulnoy, for instance, Murat claims that her friend "did not approach writing with assiduous effort, she wrote as I do by whim, in the midst of the noise of the hordes of people who visited her, and she only applied herself to her works to the extent it entertained her."³⁸ Murat's insistence on a leisurely practice of writing only reinforces the lowly status of the fairy tale as a genre. By no means did the *conteuses* aspire to the lofty heights of such prestigious genres as epic poetry or tragedy, which were dominated by male writers. But they still used the new genre and its great popularity in fashionable society to gain prominence for themselves as writers (at least in their own circles). Indeed, many of their volumes of fairy tales were best sellers in their day.³⁹ Both deliberately marginalized by writers and critics and highly popular among readers, the *conte de fées* allowed a group of women writers, by definition on the margins of the literary field of seventeenth-century France, a means to what Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément call "coming to writing," appropriating as women and for women the ideology that casts men as the only legitimate authors and authorities.⁴⁰

The work of the *conteuses* also needs to be placed within the context of what has come to be known as the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. A long-simmering debate about the relative merits of ancient Greek and Roman versus "modern" mod-

37. On the "aesthetic of frivolity" developed by the *conteuses*, see Christine Jones, "The Poetics of Enchantment," *Marvels & Tales* 17, no. 1 (2003): 55–74.

38. Henriette-Julie de Castelnau de Murat, *Ouvrages de Mme la comtesse de Murat*, 173–74, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, B. L. ms. 4371.

39. See the section of this introduction titled "Reception: Disfavor and Favor" and the introduction for each of the *conteuses*, in this volume.

40. Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jenson, trans. Sarah Cornell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

els in the artistic, literary, philosophical, and scientific realms, the Quarrel irrupted with particular virulence during the final decade of the seventeenth century.⁴¹ After public confrontations with Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), the foremost champion of the Ancients (and author of the infamous *Satire X* ["Against Women"]), Charles Perrault became the leading advocate for the "modernist" cause, in particular through his *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (*Comparison of the Ancients and the Moderns*, 1688–94). His fairy tales were also strategic illustrations of his "modernist" agenda, as the preface to his verse tales (1694) makes clear. After comparing ancient Greek and Roman "fables" and French "old wives' tales," Perrault asserts: "Seen from the perspective of the moral ... my fables deserve to be told more than most of the ancient tales."⁴² Perrault was not alone in using fairy tales to attack Greece and Rome. At the end of her story, *The Enchantments of Eloquence*, his cousin, L'Héritier, favors an indigenous over a foreign past: "Tales for tales, it seems to me that those from ancient Gaul are just about as good as those from ancient Greece, and fairies are no less able to work wonders than the gods of mythology."⁴³ Even if the other *conteuses* do not explicitly align themselves with Perrault and L'Héritier, their tales bespeak an allegiance to the "modernist" or a nationalist cause. Like Perrault's *Stories or Tales of Yesteryear*, their *contes de fées* are purportedly based on oral folk narratives of France—and *not* the literature of ancient Greece and Rome.⁴⁴ Unlike Perrault, though, the

41. For two different accounts of this quarrel, see Joan DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), and Marc Fumaroli, "Les abeilles et les araignées," in *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes: XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles*, ed. Anne-Marie Lecoq (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 7–220.

42. Perrault et al., *Contes merveilleux*, 104.

43. L'Héritier de Villandon et al., *Contes*, 91.

44. However, this "modernist" outlook did not preclude frequent commonplace references to Greek and Roman mythological characters and topoi. See below, 19–21, in this introduction. By juxtaposing the ancient marvelous with its "modern" equivalent, the *conteuses* implicitly affirm the importance of the "modern." See Bernard Magné, "Le chocolat et l'ambrosie: Le statut de la mythologie dans les contes de fées," *Cahiers de Littérature du XVIIe Siècle*, 2 (1980), 95–146, and Nadine Jasmin, *Naissance du conte féminin. Mots et merveilles: Les contes de fées de Madame d'Aulnoy (1690–1698)*, *Lumière Classique*, 44 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 32–60.

conteuses incorporate many features of seventeenth-century literature, including tropes on love elaborated in poetry and novels. By its very nature, then, this corpus illustrates a central tenet of the “modern” conception of literature: writing need not be bound by ancient models and rules, to which women, who had no formal education, did not have access; literary innovation is not only possible but a sure sign of “modern” progress, a notion broadly identified with the reign of Louis XIV. Indeed, not only was the *conte de fées* viewed as a predominately “feminine” genre within a “modern” literary aesthetics, but for much of the seventeenth century in elite secular circles—though certainly not in moralistic texts or the misogynistic tracts of the *querelle des femmes*—women were paradoxically also deemed to possess a “natural” or intuitive eloquence that was upheld as a model for men’s conversation and writing.⁴⁵ This supposedly instinctive linguistic refinement represented a break from the humanist legacy of classical models.⁴⁶ At once the product of women and, supposedly, of indigenous French culture, the *contes de fées* exemplified “modern” literary tastes as much as any other genre, old or new.

Intertexts: Sources and Rewritings

Stories by the *conteuses* reveal a sophisticated use of oral and elite literary traditions. Although the fairy tale was (and continues to be) de-

45. La Bruyère provides perhaps the most famous statement of this notion in his (none-theless ambivalent) *caractère* on women’s letters (37 [IV]): “If women were always correct, I would dare say that the letters by a few of them would perhaps be the best writing in our language” (Jean de La Bruyère, *Les caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec avec les caractères ou les moeurs de ce siècle*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Julien Benda [Paris: Gallimard, 1962], 76). See *The Doe in the Woods*, n270, in this volume. The *querelle des femmes*, which arguably extends from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the French Revolution—though some would say it continues to this day—and which pitted advocates and proponents of women against their detractors and castigators as descendants of Eve, inevitably inscribes contradictory views that are also reflected in the wider cultural and social debates about women’s status, roles, and practices, here notably their writing practices. On the *querelle des femmes*, see the Series Editors’ Introduction, available on the Iter website of the University of Toronto.

46. See, among others, Marc Fumaroli, “L’empire des femmes, ou l’esprit de joie,” in *La diplomatie de l’esprit: De Montaigne à La Fontaine*, ed. Marc Fumaroli (Paris: Hermann, 1994) 321–39.

Note on the Texts and Translations

Inclusion of all the fairy tales by the *conteuses* would have been impossible in view of the number and length of their texts. In choosing the tales to translate for this volume, we wished to feature one or two samples from each of the five leading *conteuses*: d'Aulnoy, Bernard, La Force, L'Héritier de Villandon, and Murat.¹⁴⁶ We also decided to give priority to texts that were not currently available in English. Indeed, most of the tales and the two critical texts in this volume have never before been translated.¹⁴⁷ Several of the *conteuses'* other fairy tales are included in Jack Zipes' anthologies, *Beauties, Beasts and Enchantments* (1989) and *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition* (2001) or in other collections.¹⁴⁸ Beyond making more of the stories by the

146. We have used the following editions for our translations: Bernard, *Le Prince Rosier*, in L'Héritier de Villandon et al., *Contes*, 279–85; L'Héritier de Villandon, *Marmoisan ou l'innocente tromperie*, in L'Héritier de Villandon et al., *Contes*, 43–68; d'Aulnoy, *La Princesse Carpillon*, in d'Aulnoy, *Contes des fées*, 617–62; d'Aulnoy, *La biche au bois*, in d'Aulnoy, *Contes des fées*, 687–721; La Force, *L'enchanteur*, in L'Héritier de Villandon et al., *Contes*, 339–55; La Force, *Vert et Bleu*, in L'Héritier de Villandon et al., *Contes*, 373–87; Murat, *Anguilette*, in Murat, *Contes*, 85–117; Murat, *Peine perdue*, in Murat, *Contes*, 395–403.

147. Only d'Aulnoy's *Princess Little Carp* and *The Doe in the Woods* have been previously translated, in a popular (but now out-of-print) nineteenth-century edition (d'Aulnoy, *Fairy Tales by the Countess d'Aulnoy*, trans. James Robinson Planché [London: G. Routledge, 1855], 332–74, 398–432).

148. Jack Zipes, ed. and trans., *Beauties, Beasts and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales* (New York: NAL Books, 1989), which includes: L'Héritier de Villandon's *The Discreet Princess, or the Adventures of Finette* (77–92); Bernard's *Riquet with the Tuft* (95–100); La Force's *The Good Woman* (103–18); Murat's *The Palace of Revenge* (131–41); and d'Aulnoy's *The Island of Happiness* (299–308), *Beauty with the Golden Hair* (309–20), *The Blue Bird* (321–49), *The Good Little Mouse* (350–61), *The Golden Branch* (362–86), *The Ram* (387–99), *Finette Cendron* (400–16), *The Bee and the Orange Tree* (417–37), *Babiolo* (438–58), *The Yellow Dwarf* (459–76), *The Green Serpent* (477–500), *Princess Rosette* (501–14), *The White Cat* (515–44), *The Beneficent Frog* (545–63), *Belle-Belle, or the Chevalier Fortuné* (564–98). Zipes' *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm: Texts, Criticism*, ed. and trans. Jack Zipes (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001) includes fourteen tales by the *conteuses*: d'Aulnoy's *The Wild Boar* (57–82), *The Dolphin* (113–36), *Belle-Belle or the Chevalier Fortuné* (174–205), *Princess Belle-Etoile and Prince Cheri* (229–64), *Finette-Cendron* (454–68), *The Orange Tree and the Bee* (751–70), and *The Ram* (789–800); Bernard's *Riquet with the Tuft* (717–22); La Force's *Persinette* (479–84); L'Héritier de Villandon's *The Discreet Princess; or the Adventures of Finette* (528–43), *The Enchantment of Eloquence*;

conteuses accessible to English-speaking readers, we have sought to include a representative sample of the thematic and narrative features of this corpus with particular attention to characters and plot situations that complicate stereotypical assumptions about the fairy-tale genre. We also sought to convey the wide variety of approaches adopted by the *conteuses*, especially in terms of the length and tone of their works.

Among various editions of the texts in French, we decided to follow the most recent, authoritative, and scholarly edition, published by Editions Honoré Champion (Paris, 2004–). In cases where a different edition had a substantive variant or addition, we included it in an extended note (see for instance, *Marmoisan*, n63). We are grateful to the editors of the relevant volumes—Nadine Jasmin (vol. 1), Raymonde Robert (vol. 2), and Geneviève Patard (vol. 3)—for their meticulous work, especially their informed notes, which were consistently useful.

In our translations, we have tried to make the *contes de fées* as readable as possible without compromising the nuances of the words or the tenor of the different, urbane, and at times ironic, styles of the *conteuses*. To be sure, there were some French terms for which we had difficulty settling on a single translation because of their special meanings in the seventeenth century. We have noted the most important in footnotes, which typically involve social, cultural, and literary norms and ideals, such as *agréable*, *bienséance*, *galant*, *négligence*, and *tendresse*. There is the special case of the polysemous and at times undefinable notion of *honnêteté*, an ideal in seventeenth-century France that encompasses the social and the ethical, in varying combinations according to the inclinations of the user.¹⁴⁹ Typically, we featured the ideas of “decorous and ethical” for both the adjective (*honnête*) and the

or, *the Effects of Sweetness* (550–64), and *Ricdin-Ricdon* (588–625); and Murat's *The Pig King* (82–96) and *The Savage* (205–20). See also Marina Warner, ed., *Wonder Tales*, illus. Sophie Herxheimer (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), which includes d'Aulnoy's *The White Cat* (19–63) and *The Great Green Worm* (189–229) and L'Héritier de Villandon's *The Clever Princess* (65–97).

149. In addition, there are significant differences between the male honorific *honnête homme*, which contains a full panoply of social, cultural, and moral virtues, and the more limited female honorific *honnête femme*, which more often than not connotes modesty and decency.

noun. We decided to translate names of characters if these had clearly semantic components (referring to physical traits [Prince Hunchback in *Princess Little Carp*] or to animals [the eponymous Little Eel]) for they convey important elements of humor in these texts; otherwise, we retain the original French. After some hesitation, we eliminated the capitalization of nouns, even though we recognize that such emphasis gives a word heightened meaning. For sentences that were particularly complex, with several relative or dependent clauses, we felt that readability justified our breaking down certain phrases into shorter, more comprehensible units. The same principle guided our decision on paragraphing; in some tales (for example, *The Enchanter*), what seemed to us an excessive use of very brief paragraphs led us to collapse several into one substantial paragraph, following practices in a different edition of that particular tale.

These are but some of the problems we encountered in translating this group of tales by the *conteuses* into English, a translation that we hope stimulates readers to learn more about—and to read more of the work of—these eloquent and imaginative seventeenth-century women writers.

The Enchanter

Notice for the tale below: *The Enchanter* is taken from an ancient Gothic²⁹³ book, named *Perceval*.²⁹⁴ We have omitted many things that

293. “Gothic” has the negative connotations of antiquated and old fashioned in the seventeenth century; see for instance, Boileau’s *Art poétique* (1674): “You would say that Ronsard on his rustic pipes / Comes again humming his gothic idyls,” II, v. 22, *Oeuvres complètes*, 162.

294. In fact, La Force’s model is not *Perceval ou le conte du graal* (*Perceval or the Story of the Grail*), c. 1180–90, by the twelfth-century French poet, Chrétien de Troyes, an unfinished text that depicts Perceval’s initiation into knighthood at the court of Artu, and then follows Gauvain, Artu’s nephew, in his quest for the holy grail. Rather, her tale resembles an episode from the first continuation of this romance, written anonymously in the twelfth century, entitled *Caradoc*. Raymonde Robert documents the existence of a 1530 edition in modern French of this first continuation at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Res. Y2 74), which focuses on the illegitimate loves of a magician and a queen (*Le conte de fées littéraire*, 177–81). For three nights following the marriage of Ysenne de Carahès with the king of Nantes, the enchanter, Eliavrès, gives the appearance of a young woman to three animals—a greyhound, a trout, and a mare—and places them in the husband’s bed. This allows Eliavrès to spend the nights with her; he leaves her pregnant with a son, Caradoc, who then becomes a knight at King Arthur’s court. During a festival, an unknown knight exacts from the king the promise that a knight will cut off this stranger’s head: Caradoc accepts, but the cut-off head goes back onto the body. The knight demands the same right in return a year later, but at the moment of Caradoc’s decapitation, Eliavrès reveals that he is his father. Caradoc denounces the adultery to his presumed father, the queen is shut up in a tower, and the enchanter is forced to bed a bitch, a trout, and a mare, which produce a greyhound, a boar, and a horse, all of them, then, “brothers” of Caradoc. Enraged by their punishment, the queen and the magician trap Caradoc, and the magician summons a serpent that attaches itself to Caradoc’s arm, and that nothing can detach. He will be freed by a ruse: a maiden (Guinier) who loves him accepts to attract the snake onto her breast; but in trying to kill the reptile, the maiden’s brother (Sir Cador) cuts off the tip of her breast, which will ultimately be replaced by a golden nipple. Caradoc is freed, but his arm has been permanently damaged by the snake, which explains his nickname, Caradoc Short Arm. La Force is faithful to this old tale, with minor exceptions, among these, the person who conceives of the snake to hurt Carados. (See Robert, *Le conte de fées*, 177–79.) Caradoc also appears in other parts of Arthurian literature. It seems to be the case, however, that La Force is also thinking of the Green Knight from Chrétien’s *Perceval*, since the mysterious knight/enchanter here wears a green habit. And like Chrétien’s *Perceval*, *The Enchanter* features a quest for a patrilineal identity, because of a queen’s adulterous behavior. The themes of husbands who are jealous of the enchanters-lovers of their wives and who then build towers in which to confine their spouses appear in *lais* and *fabliaux* of the period, for instance, in Marie de France’s *Yonec*. The beheading test is a Celtic motif that appears in the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the*

did not conform to our customs and mores²⁹⁵ We have added many others. Some names have also been changed. This is the only tale not entirely written by the author; the rest are purely of her invention.²⁹⁶



Once upon a time, there was a king called “the good king,” because he was virtuous and just, loved by his subjects and cherished by his neighbors. His fame had spread throughout the world, and so another king came to his realm to ask him for a wife. The good king, honored by such an act of confidence, chose the most captivating of his nieces and promised her to him. She was called Isène the Beautiful.²⁹⁷

News of such an illustrious marriage was spread the world over, so that everyone could witness the feasts and tournaments to celebrate it. It was wondrous that so many guests attended.

Among the princes who came, the Lord of the Far-Away Islands drew great attention: he was handsome and a great Enchanter.

As soon as he saw Isène the Beautiful, he fell in love and was very angry that she would belong to another. He felt sure that if he had come earlier and had asked the good king, he would have gained her hand. He was aggrieved by this thought and racked his brain to find a way to possess such a perfect beauty.

The wedding finally took place, to his great regret. But he knew how to make excellent use of his magical gifts. On the wedding night, when the bride had been put to bed and was left alone, according to the custom of the time, she felt unable to stay in bed, because of the effect of some secret power. She got up and went into a small room next to her chamber. She sat on a daybed, happily looking at the rare objects in

Green Knight. We thank Megan Moore for this information that helps place into context La Force's particular rendition of the tale.

295. The notion of updating the ancients to conform to modern, seventeenth-century times, is part and parcel of the concept of *bienséance* (what is proper or fitting) and appears as well in the prefaces of Jean Racine's plays; see for instance the preface to his *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1674).

296. This is not entirely true since *Persinette* seems to follow a folktale (ATU 310), popularly known as *Rapunzel*, the title of the Grimms' tale.

297. In view of the tale of adultery that follows, Isène's name may evoke that of Iseut (Isolde) and her relationship to King Mark and to Tristan.

this beautiful room, which was ablaze with light. But soon something else drew her attention: she saw the Lord of the Far-Away Islands enter.

He knelt before her and told her he loved her. She felt such a powerful impulse²⁹⁸ toward him that no magic could create anything like it if it did not come from a natural feeling.²⁹⁹

He said the most beautiful things in the world to the queen; she responded so well he thought he was favored, and confessed he had placed in the king's bed a slave³⁰⁰ for whom he would mistake her. Isène laughed, and spent the night making fun of her husband. When daylight came, she acted as if nothing had happened.

The king, delighted with his good fortune, felt he was the happiest of men, but the Enchanter was the most in love and the most satisfied.³⁰¹ He won all the prizes in the tournaments, and gave Isène the Beautiful a hundred signs of love, but no one noticed. They stole glances at each other; if they danced, they squeezed each other's hand; at mealtime, they drank from the same glass: nothing compares to the happiness of a new love.

The second night, the Enchanter stayed with the queen once again, and put his slave into the king's bed. The day was spent in giving those proofs of love that have infinite appeal to refined souls, even when given in secret.

The third night was similar to the other two. The Enchanter enjoyed the same delights, and the king thought he had as well, with the person beside him. When the celebrations were over, everyone went their separate ways and the king took leave of the good king, and led his new wife to his estates. Soon afterwards, she realized she was with child. When the time came, she gave birth to the most handsome prince ever seen. He was named Carados. The king loved him passionately because he thought he was the father, and the queen cherished him with great tenderness.³⁰²

298. See L'Héritier, *Marmoisan*, n94, in this volume.

299. So saying, the author discards the notion of an imposed spell on Isène.

300. Medieval romances, at least in the West, do not usually feature slaves, which the author treats casually—unremarkably—here.

301. Despite the rhetoric of indirection, the text nonetheless makes it clear that two couples had sexual relations that night.

302. Another example of parental love for the child. See *Marmoisan*, n80, in this volume.

The prince grew rapidly and became more handsome by the day. When he was twelve years old, people thought he was eighteen. As soon as his teachers showed him something, within minutes he knew it better than they did. He danced well, sang just as well, rode well, and did all his work perfectly: he understood history, and was ignorant of nothing a great prince should know.³⁰³

He heard so often about the court of the good king that he developed a strong desire to travel there. He indicated this to the king and queen, but they objected: they could not consent to have such a handsome child leave them. But young Carados found their resistance intolerable and fell ill with sorrow. His father and mother, seeing him grow worse each day, decided to make him happy. They prepared a fine equipage for him, embraced him a thousand times, and let him leave.

I won't even tell you how he was received at the good king's court; it goes without saying. People paid him a hundred compliments, and were surprised how well built, handsome, and charming he was. He finished improving his skills at the court. Then he went to war and performed so many fine deeds people spoke of nothing but his valor.

He was eighteen when the king's celebration took place. It was the king's birthday, which he was accustomed to commemorating with great splendor. He would hold full court and usually grant everything requested of him. His throne was set up in a wondrously large hall, the front of which looked out onto the countryside, with grand archways from ceiling to floor, so it was easy to see who was arriving. It was there that a fine, large assembly surrounded the king's throne. A very beautiful woman stood next to him along with a great number of princesses and ladies. Those present were in a joyful mood and thought only of rejoicing. Carados shone in this gathering, as does the rose over other flowers.

Suddenly, they saw a horseman on the plain mounted on a beautiful white horse with a biscuit-colored mane and tail coming toward them gracefully. When he was close enough, people noticed he was dressed in green and girded with a magnificent sash on which hung a sword so brilliant with gems that its radiance was unbearable.

303. The social, physical, and intellectual skills of the prince (and the courtier) are featured in manuals of the period, beginning especially with Baltasar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (*The Courtier*), 1528.

He was divinely handsome. A hundred locks of blond hair covered his shoulders, a crown of flowers was on his head, and a boyant, cheerful expression enlivened his face. As he rode along, he sang most pleasantly. When he neared the hall, he sprang lightly to the ground, and the good king's people, well trained, led his horse away to tend to it.

He entered the hall where the good king was and had such a fine manner he attracted the gaze of the entire assembly. The ladies in particular found him charming. He walked toward the good king's throne with noble daring after greeting the illustrious company.

He knelt before the king, unfastened his sword, and laid it at his feet. "Sire," he said, "I come to ask your majesty for a gift. I trust that on such a solemn day your goodness will not refuse me."

"Speak, winsome stranger," the good king replied. "I refuse nothing on a day like today, and I would not begin refusals, which are against my custom, with you. I give you my word that whatever you ask, you shall have it."

"In that case," replied the man, "I ask of you, Sire, an embrace for an embrace."

"What does that mean?" the bewildered king exclaimed. "You give me a riddle instead of asking a favor. I don't understand, not at all." Then the good king turned and asked all those assembled there if they knew what the words meant. They answered that they didn't know, and so, once again he asked the man to explain himself.

"An embrace for an embrace," answered the man, "means nothing else, Sire, but that someone of this noble assembly must cut off my head with my sword, which you see here."

At this request, the assembly let out a long exclamation of astonishment. The king nearly fell off his throne with surprise. The queen scowled with horror, and her beautiful ladies showed distress.

The good king tried to be relieved of such a barbarous promise and said he had been taken by surprise. But the stubborn man held firm and told the king that his honor was at stake. The king was as sorrowful as he could be. He asked in vain whether anyone wanted to carry out this horrible execution, but no one said a word, which upset the king even more. In vain did he explain to the man that he had cruelly troubled the joy of the day. But he remained firm that someone should cut off his head.

Finally, Carados came forward and told the king he was too devoted to him to suffer the insult this man rendered him, given the impossible stakes he had placed on the boon he had been granted, and thus, that he was ready to make good on the king's promise.

The man smiled pleasantly as he looked at Carados and said he was ready to meet death. An executioner's block was brought: Carados drew the deadly sword, the man knelt down and all eyes were fixed on this astonishing spectacle. Carados then severed the head from the body. It made three turns, and bounded three times, it planted itself back on the torso. The man got back up with a jaunty air.³⁰⁴

If everyone had been stunned by the request he had made, they were even more astonished by his resurrection. After all the shouting, a dumbfounded silence came over them for a long while, as if they were under a spell.

The good king was gratified by this turn of events, and Carados even more so, having only committed an innocent murder.³⁰⁵ But the man cheerfully approached the king and knelt again.

"Sire," he said, "I call on you to make good on the gift you granted me."

"But haven't I done so?" asked the king.

"No, Sire," he continued. "You have only granted me half of it. I requested an embrace for an embrace. Carados gave it to me, and now I must return the favor and cut his head off."

At this proposal, everyone began to shout; a thousand ladies' screams most especially could be heard that seemed to protest such a barbarous request. The king was dismayed, the queen and all the ladies were beside themselves, and the assembly was upset, so well loved was Carados. He alone appeared calm, and told the king he would be only too happy to shed his blood in order to redeem the good king's honor.

The man looked at him again with a smile, and then turned to the king. "Sire," he said, "I have disturbed the pleasure of this cel-

304. This scene, in which Carados unknowingly seems to kill his father, bears at least superficial resemblance to the myth of Oedipus. More generally, it recalls the cycle of death and rebirth that is central to some theories of the hero (see for instance Lord Raglan, "The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama," in *In Quest of the Hero*, ed. Robert A. Segal [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990], 89–175).

305. The phrase, "an innocent murder," is purposely paradoxical.

ebriation enough. It would be too much commotion for one day. I will delay the execution of this affair, and I beg all these princes and lords to be here a year from today. I will return on that day for you to fulfill your promise, and we shall see if Carados has as much courage to suffer death as he had resolve to give *me* death.”

After this, everyone sat down to dine, but the banquet was very melancholic for the guests were saddened by Carados’s fate.

The year passed with many opportunities for this prince to attain glory, and he performed a hundred great feats. At the end of the year, he was the first to appear in the assembly hall. Everyone was dismayed and constantly turned their eyes toward the countryside, still hoping that perhaps they would not see the dreaded arrival of the man.

He appeared at last, astride the same horse, with his green habit, sash, beautiful sword, and crown of roses. He sang, as he had previously, and knelt the same way before the king to ask that he fulfill his promise. The good king begged in vain to be released, and the queen, seeing that the king was having no success, came with her ladies to beseech him to grant Carados his life, offering him the most beautiful of the king’s nieces along with half of the kingdom. But the queen’s prayers and tears gained nothing.

Carados alone seemed unmoved by the peril that threatened him. He came toward the good king with an assured air and asked him to let the inevitable end quickly. The block was brought and the prince presented his neck. The man raised his sword and held it in the air such a long time that Carados cast him a look that would have melted cruelty herself: “Finish with it,” he said. “You are giving me a thousand deaths instead of one.”

At these words the man raised his arm higher still, then calmly put his sword back in its scabbard and offered Carados his hand to help him to his feet. “Rise, young prince,” he said, “you had already given signs of courage on a hundred occasions. I am very happy we have seen proof of your resolve.”³⁰⁶

A thousand cries of joy rose to the heavens at such an unexpected outcome. The good king descended from his throne and embraced the man. The queen, the ladies, and the entire assembly seemed more confounded than rational.

306. Both courage and resolve (or steadfastness) are qualities of the ideal knight.

The celebration was full of cheer, when the man asked to speak to Carados in private. They went into a gallery where the man, after showing Carados signs of endearment, informed him that he was the Lord of the Far-Away Islands, and that he was his father. At this news the prince turned red, and his face lit up with anger. He told the Enchanter this was clearly not true, that he only wished to sully the reputation of Isène the Beautiful, and that her husband, the king, was his father. The Enchanter was surprised to find him so ill natured. "You are an ingrate," he replied, "but you are nonetheless my son. It was I who bestowed on you the many fine qualities that make everyone love you. Ah, Carados! I fear you will regret your harshness toward me."

They separated, but a few days later Carados, who had not believed he was the son of the Enchanter, wished nonetheless to see the man whom he wanted to be his father. So he took leave of the good king and the queen and went to find the husband of Isène the Beautiful.³⁰⁷

He was greeted with great expressions of affection from the king and queen. When Carados and the king were alone, the king spoke of the fear he had felt for Carados's life, threatened by a stranger, but the prince was imprudent enough to tell him everything the Enchanter had said.

The king, who loved Carados with infinite tenderness, was struck by his tale and assured him that whatever the truth should turn out to be, he would not love him any the less, that he would always consider him his one and only son and successor. However, he had to clarify the matter with the queen, who could have had some dalliance with the Lord of the Far-Away Islands.

They sent for Isène the Beautiful, who fainted when she heard the truth. She seemed entirely convinced and didn't waste time denying it, but her greatest sorrow was to be accused and convicted by her own son.³⁰⁸

The king consulted Carados on a remedy for so great an injury. Carados said that although the king's shame was secret, a dazzling revenge was required: the king should send for workmen from every quarter and use his wealth to have a tower of impenetra-

307. The husband, whom he no longer calls "father."

308. It is noteworthy that she shows no signs of remorse.

ble strength built in which the queen would be locked under good, secure guard.³⁰⁹

This advice pleased the king and the plan was executed. In a few days, the tower was built, and the queen was locked up inside. Carados felt no remorse for the treatment he imposed on his mother,³¹⁰ and after that, left to return to the good king's court. He was only two days from the capital city of this kingdom when he glimpsed at a distance something bright in a meadow. As he got closer, he saw there were tents and that on the top of the highest there was a gold ball with an eagle made of the same material that seemed to rise toward the heavens.

Carados went toward the tents. He didn't see anyone, so he got off his horse and entered the tent that seemed most beautiful to him. Inside there was a fine bed, whose curtains were drawn. And on the bed lay a young person, unequaled in beauty, fast asleep.³¹¹

The prince was immediately captivated by the sight of something so lovely. The first moment was given to admiration, the second to love. And he loved without being able to stop himself from loving her.³¹² Contrary to the customs of that age of great passion, he became as bold as people are today.³¹³ In fact, he was emboldened as soon as he fell in love.

He began by putting one knee to the ground. He took the young girl's hand and kissed it. But his audacity increased and she awoke, alarmed to find herself in the arms of a man she had not seen before.³¹⁴ Then she screamed and tried to throw herself at the foot

309. The punishment of the woman is consistent with narratives inflected by patriarchal gender ideology; moreover, revenge against the man is not exacted, at least, not immediately.

310. Son and mother thus have similar traits.

311. There is an obvious similarity here with Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty*. An even more precise parallel is Basile's *Sun, Moon, and Talia* (likely the source for Perrault's tale) in which a king happens upon a maiden in a magically induced sleep, then rapes and impregnates her. See Basile, *The Tale of the Tales*, 414. Here, however, the sleeping princess averts sexual aggression.

312. An immediate, involuntary impulse, as was the case with his mother and the Enchanter.

313. The "Gothic" period is thus identified with great passion and the timid, courtly, respectful lover. The contrast between the (virtuous) fairy-tale past and the (decadent) present is a leitmotiv throughout the narratives of the *conteuses*. See Seifert, *Fairy Tales*.

314. He thus behaves as his real father did with his mother.