The Fairy-Tale
Vanguard
The Fairy-Tale Vanguard:

*Literary Self-Consciousness in a Marvelous Genre*

Edited by

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing
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Contes de Fées

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AN UNDERDOG IN THE VANGUARD

STIJN PRAET

I.

The image on this volume’s cover is taken from an edition of Jonathan Swift’s mock-epic satire *The Battle of the Books*, which serves as an introductory piece to his *Tale of a Tub* (1704). Set against the backdrop of the so-called Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns that was being waged among certain groups of French and English literati, Swift’s text recounts how the books at St. James’ Library have become animated by the spirits of their creators to have it out with one another—classical versus contemporary authors, but also critics versus their literary objects. It seems quite fitting that it is the actual books that should do the fighting here. After all, how do writers pack a punch, if not through their writing? Not only do books constitute a concrete realization and exhibition of their authors’ poetics and artistic projects, some of them also express a keen awareness of their own status (artistic, social, epistemological, etc.) as works of literature. Indeed, books can be perfectly well equipped to fend for themselves.

Making our way across Swift’s bookish battlefield, we encounter many valiant warriors, all of them convinced of their side’s superiority. Also among them is a codex incarnation of the French Academician Charles Perrault, fighting for the Moderns—quite briefly, I must add, for he immediately gets his brains bashed out by Homer on horseback. While best remembered today for his collections of fairy tales in verse and prose, Perrault was also a leading figure in the French *Querelle* and author of the impressive multi-volume *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les Arts et les Sciences* (*Parallel of the Ancients and the Moderns Regarding the Arts and Sciences*, 1688-1692), in which he evaluates the merits of both sides. In fact, his fairy-tale collections may be understood as a practical demonstration and rhetorical defense of his (nuanced)...
Introduction

If we imagine Perrault the Warrior Book, declaring his cause and fighting for the future of literature, it might just as well be a copy of his Histoires et contes du temps passé (Hi)Stories and Tales of Times Gone By.

As the present volume will confirm, Perrault's collection is but one of many cases in which fairy tales are entwined with expressions of literary self-consciousness, both in the shape of metaliterary reflection and formal experimentation. Now, going through the existing scholarship pertaining to this particular topic, we find that the focus has mostly lain on postmodern fairy tales and fairy-tale adaptations, by authors such as Robert Coover and A.S. Byatt. This is perhaps not much of a surprise, given that overt displays of literary self-consciousness are one of the staple features of postmodern literature in general. Meanwhile, literary self-consciousness is hardly a postmodern invention, and there are few devices associated with it that have not been around for centuries, even millennia. Texts such as Lucian of Samosata's Ἀληθῆ διηγήματα (True Histories, 2nd c. AD), Guillaume de Machault's Le voir dit (True Account, 1363-65), Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote (1605, 1615) and Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy (1759) may serve as a sobering reminder of that—to name but four canonical titles from an enormous corpus of well and lesser known historical works, including fairy tales.

There is truth to Elizabeth Harries' observation that “because we have ignored or forgotten other moments in the history of fairy tales, we fail to see the continuities that run through it,” and that “[self-conscious] play and critique have been part of the genre of the literary tale almost from the beginning” (Twice Upon 16). Luckily, this neglectful amnesia is in the process of being remedied. With the gradual emancipation of fairy-tale studies from folkloristics in the later twentieth century, scholars have grown increasingly comfortable with approaching the fairy tale as just another genre among literary genres: not mysterious, timeless and immutable, but with a documentable, traceable history of its own, and

1 I use the term “modernist” (not capitalized) here in its general sense of non- or anti-conventionalist/-traditionalist/-classicist. For the intimate connection between the French Querelle and the rise of the conte de(s) fées, see Fumaroli; Heidmann and Adam, Textualité 33-152; Seifert 61-78; and Sophie Raynard’s contribution to this volume.

2 See for instance the seminal studies by Bacchilega; Benson; Joosen; Tiffin, Marvelous Geometry.

3 In her lemma on “Metafiction” for the Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales, Tiffin acknowledges that literary self-consciousness in fairy tales does precede postmodernism, though she appears hesitant to push it back further than Victorian times (622).
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inscribed within the evolving dynamics of specific literary fields. Some of them have also begun to explore matters of literary self-consciousness throughout the genre's history. When we combine the results of their variously specialized efforts (mostly focused on specific authors, texts or time periods), a larger picture begins to emerge: long before postmodernity, the fairy-tale tradition had already produced a myriad of stories and collections that self-consciously reflect on and experiment with their own status as literary texts and their relations to other (hypo)texts, genres, aesthetic currents, and artistic movements.

Examples range from the early framed tale collections of Giambattista Basile and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, to Christoph Martin Wieland's quixotic dalliances in fairyland, to the fairy-tale farragoes and deconstructions of Decadent authors like Catulle Mendès and Anatole France, and the High Modernist tales and allusive flirtations of Robert Walser and Virginia Woolf. What I want to propose here is that this recurring connection between fairy tales and literary self-consciousness is not just a question of some scattered, coincidental cases with a predictable proliferation in postmodernity, but a conspicuously well-represented diachronic phenomenon that runs throughout the literary genre's entire history.

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Textualité
Conte Métafictions

Twice Upon

Fairy Tales for the Disillusioned

Lo cunto de li cunti The Tale of Tales

fairy-tale-like

prehistory
II.

Le piacevoli notti The Pleasant Nights
Feen-Märchen Tales of the Fairies
The Tales of Beedle the Bard

et passim

Fairy Tales Framed
An Underdog in the Vanguard

may encourage their readers to consider the literary constructedness of the text itself (its textuality, intertextuality, genericity), as well as broader literary questions that exceed it, thus complementing, supplementing or replacing the more or less direct metaliterary statements one might also find in peritexts. Apart from the fictional(ized) peritextual pieces mentioned above, examples of such devices include the purposeful use of intertextuality to elicit a direct comparison with the text's fairy-tale and other hypotexts (already quite intensely during the French vogue), the ostentatious deconstruction of narratorial voice and genre conventions (extremely so in postmodern tales), the thematization of artistic creativity and the transformative power of the imagination (e.g. many a Romantic Kunstmärchen),10 the identification of the Author with their characters (e.g. the conteuses in their guise of refined and powerful creative fairies),11 as well as the embedding of tales within narrative frameworks such as dialogues or plot-driven frame tales (before the twentieth century very common where fairy-tales are concerned).12 The latter in particular allows the author to dramatize and contextualize the act of storytelling and writing itself by putting tales in the mouths or hands of fictional characters, having them debate their significance and artistic merits, highlighting the relevant connections between fairy tales and mundane life, and showing the potential effects of marvelous stories on a given audience.

texts and discursive conventions, all acts which can be construed as a form of dialogic response. Even the most "faithful" translation/adaptation of a given fairy tale might be read as a metafictional perspective on its own source text. That being said, "metafiction'" is more commonly applied here in the restricted sense to fictional writing in which this reflexive function is brought to the fore. See the classic theoretical studies by Hutcheon, Scholes and Waugh, as well as the edited essay collections by Currie and Lepaludier, the latter of which also includes analyses of tales by Angela Carter.

10 For the author/artist as hero in the Romantic Kunstmärchen, see Zipes, Breaking 23-46, 73-75, 100-102. For a fictional demonstration of the imagination's potential as a cognitive tool, also see Kérchy's contribution.

11 See for instance Seifert 88-97 and Raynard's contribution.

12 While Straparola and Basile still turn to the Boccaccian model (in itself preceded by various classical, medieval European and Oriental approaches to narrative framing), later authors such as D'Aulnoy, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, Wieland, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ludwig Tieck, Bettina von Arnim, Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Nathaniel Hawthorne would keep experimenting with a variety of structural set-ups for their narrative frameworks. Also see Harries, Twice Upon 104-134.
The second, less prototypical expression of literary self-consciousness that needs to be touched on here can be a bit harder to formally isolate, exactly because it is so fundamental: literary experimentation, or the conscious digression of conventions and propriety in order to try out something new, based on an author's understanding of the literary field, whether or not with a notable and durable effect on its further development. It might seem paradoxical for the fairy tale, a genre that is so popularly accompanied by the word "traditional", to be associated here with artistic novelty. However, the better we acquaint ourselves with the fairy tale's history, the more it becomes obvious that we are in fact dealing with a very protean genre that has always continued to refashion itself in relation to other genres and artistic developments and movements, also in different ways at the same time. Tradition, yes, but not monolithic or reactionary! What is more, fairy-tale authors have not just responded to these movements and developments a posteriori; many of them have actually taken the lead, positioning themselves at the very vanguard of literary experimentalism and innovation, with stakes and repercussions go beyond the fairy tale-genre itself. That is at least the impression one derives from contemporary fairy-tale scholarship, including the contributions to this volume. Surely, this is not merely a case of wide-spread "enthusiastic myopia", of individual scholars' misguided insistence that "their" texts are somehow special, subversive, ahead of their time, due to a lack or distortion of perspective?

III.

If my proposition is correct that the entanglement of fairy tales and literary self-consciousness constitutes a literary-historical trend that goes beyond...
the coincidental, then the question that suggests itself is what the underlying reasons for that trend might be. Is it possible that, within this vast and heterogeneous corpus of texts that we have come to jumble together as fairy tales, there are some substantial and/or formal constants that actually provoke and facilitate a literary self-conscious stance from their authors? To put it the other way around: why would authors with a penchant for literary theory and debate, metafictional play, or formal experimentation want to turn to fairy-tale(-like) writing? Without trying to offer an exhaustive answer to these questions, I would like us to consider two more or less generically inherent factors that appear of relevance here: firstly, its long-standing status as an underdog genre, and secondly, its formal suitability for reflexivity and experimentation. Both these factors are connected to the fairy tale's status as a fictional genre par excellence: Though also informed by historical realities and perspectives, one of the fairy tale's strongest generic markers is its ostentatious digression from what is conventionally accepted at a given time and place to the mimetic representation of historical-empirical reality (that which was, is, or could be), most obviously through the inclusion of marvelous beings, objects and events that would be impossible or at least very improbable outside of its fictional realm. The fairy tale's “high fictionality” is further enhanced by some of its more typical formal features that also render it textually opaque: from the very start, the fairy-tale reader is introduced into a world that is not delineated in time and space, once upon a time in a far-off land, nowhere and everywhere. The characters inhabiting this world are relatively one-dimensional, their appearance, personality, conduct and functional relations to each other clear-cut, with little room for psychologized realism and internal development. Plot structures are fairly linear, to the point of becoming predictable, even formulaic. Indeed, the fairy tale tends to revel in flatness, clear lines, patterns and abstraction. While the world that it constructs might be thoroughly engrossing to the
The genre's heightened fictionality and opaque textuality have not always been met positively in terms of artistic appreciation, evincing gentle mocking, icy disdain and even fiery indignation instead. As with other fabulatory genres, from beast fables and chivalric romances to modern fantasy and science-fiction novels, fairy tales have consistently been marginalized by their detractors as naïve trifles and puerile pastime, admissible perhaps when offered to children (though even that is not always a given) or among so-called "vulgar crowds", but certainly not among educated readers, who should know better than to buy into such fanciful, idle day-dreaming and limit their readerly diet to more substantial and edificatory fare.16

Extant examples of such criticism abound, from the Abbot of Villiers' dialogic treatise (1699) against the French fairy-tale vogue and other genres "in bad taste" ("Not a single philosopher or able person that I know has ever invented or composed fairy tales", De Villiers 76, own trans.),17 to one recent film reviewer's historically misinformed exasperation regarding the 2015 adaptation of Basile's *Lo cunto* ("Since when are fairy tales aimed at adult viewers? [...It] points toward the increasing infantilization of the audience, where stories shorn of nuance and designed for a six-year-old's rather limited attention span become the norm for adult minds", Fazio); and from the Dutch librarian Jacob Geel's concerns (1893) that "a deeply imprinted belief in that magical world [of fairy tales] in young minds may give rise to a nauseating, dim-witted narrow-mindedness that surely cannot be the goal of man's Higher education" (ix, own trans.),18 to evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins' musings (2014) that it might be "rather pernicious to inculcate into a child a view of the world which includes supernaturalism [...]

16 This observation is also the starting point of Kathryn Hume's *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (1984), which presents itself as a complement to Erich Auerbach's classic *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*. 

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Lo cunto

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"...aucun Philosophe & aucun habile homme que je sçache, n'a inventé ou composé des Contes de Fées". For the good Abbot's treatise, see Sophie Reynard's contribution.

"...een diep ingeprent geloof aan die tooverwereld in de jeugd, ten gronde leggen kan tot een misselijke domme bekrompenheid, die niet het doel eener Hoogere opvoeding van den mensch zijn kan".
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This brings us to a first significant factor in the long marriage of fairy tales and literary self-consciousness, namely that fairy-tale authors have usually been well aware of such prejudice and the fact that they were practicing an "artistically suspect" type of writing. This is what has so often stimulated them to employ the kinds of peritextual discourse and metafictional devices discussed above, more specifically to the purpose of an anticipatory vindication and demonstration of their tales' artistic merits and edificatory potential, ranging from light-heartedly playful to dead serious. It is not without irony that some fairy-tale authors, already in the eighteenth century, partially side with the perennial critics by building in implicit and explicit criticisms of their fairy-tale hypotexts and what they perceive as the "traditional" fairy tale's ethics and esthetics. By framing those as backwards, simplistic and naïve, their own writing is shown off as more modern and sophisticated—which of course is just another line of defense...20

The second relatively constant factor is more positive, explorative rather than defensive: while the fairy tale's heightened fictionality and opaque textuality have long fed into its (non-ubiquitous) reputation as a trivial, whimsical and childish genre, they also make it into an ideal playground and miniature laboratory for all manners of formal foregrounding, introspection and experimentation. Where better to examine and push the boundaries of literary writing than in a genre that combines the bending of the strictures of conventionalized mimetic realism with a clear-shaped and thus rather noticable textual and narrative architecture? The tale's condensed format is not unimportant in this regard; as Angela Carter once put it with reference to the short story, it "is not minimalist, it is rococo. I feel in absolute control. It is like writing chamber music rather than symphonies" (qtd. in Simpson xix).

Apart from these generically inherent factors, we could also think of other, historically more variable ones, like the eighteenth-century emergence of children's literature and the fairy tale for children, which stimulated the elaboration of new, presumably age-appropriate styles;21 or the nineteenth-century...
truly

IV.

not

all
does
texts outside this volume's scope. We hope that they will help pique the interest of fairy-tale scholars and students in this topic and thus, in the long run, enhance our understanding of the fairy tale as literature in relation to literature.

The chapters of this volume have been arranged into two thematic sections, each of which concludes with a critical response piece, respectively by Ruth B. Bottigheimer and Elizabeth Wanning Harries. These responses are meant to enhance the volume’s internal coherence and to stimulate critical dialogue regarding some of the stances taken by its contributors. Both of them also offer suggestions as to where fairy-tale scholarship in general could go from here.

Part One, entitled “Metaliterary Reflections”, opens with Sophie Raynard’s analysis of the programmatic peritexts and metafictional passages through which the late-seventeenth-century conteuses Lhéritier, D’Aulnoy and De Murat attempt to “market” their takes on the fairy tale as a modern literary genre that is both morally and aesthetically respectable. Raynard relates their project to the concurrent Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes and the objections of some of the burgeoning genre’s notable detractors.

Remaining in the environment of the late-seventeenth-century French courts and salons, Ute Heidmann presents us with the specific material, literary, and historical context in which Perrault’s “La belle au bois dormant” (“The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods”, 1695) first took shape. She posits that Perrault’s tales, originally addressed to the Bourbon Princess Elisabeth Charlotte d’Orléans, were set up peri- and intertextually as a hermeneutic exercise that hinges on the reader’s familiarity with, on the one hand, literary traditions, and on the other, contemporaneous events and discourses concerning the plights of young aristocrat women.

Moving to Victorian England, Anna Kérchy tackles Lewis Carroll’s fairy tale-adjacent adventures of Alice in Wonderland, arguing how they provide their readers with elaborate reflections on and imaginings of the process of imagination and imaginative storytelling, not merely as a fanciful or artistic activity, but as a fundamental cognitive capacity that entails a variety of applications, from social skills to concrete problem-solving.

Next, Jessica Tiffin discusses how half a century later, Edith Nesbit’s Edwardian fairy tales for children invite their readers to ponder the relevance of the genre by staging playful commentaries on its archaic feudal structures, which clashed with Nesbit’s own socio-politically progressive convictions. At the same time, Tiffin explains, her tales tend to foreground the “science-fiction wonder” of recent scientific and technological...
Introduction

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discovery, thus relocating the fairy tale from the past to a future-in-the-making.


Part One ends with Emeline Morin’s comparative analysis of two postmodern adaptations of canonical fairy tales: Eric Chevillard’s Le Vaillant petit tailleur (The Brave Little Tailor, 2003) and Coover’s Briar Rose (1996). Not unlike Nesbit’s tales, both these texts rely on metafictional techniques to playfully question older modes of storytelling while also undermining the fairy tale’s penchant for readerly enchantment and happy endings. Morin suggests the possibility that the respective manners in which this is accomplished within the texts may be indicative of more general Francophone and Anglophone attitudes towards “traditional” fairy tales and how to adapt them.

Part Two is devoted to “Intergeneric, Linguistic and Stylistic Experimentations”. It begins with Richard van Leeuwen’s treatment of the powerful creative impact made by Antoine Galland’s Mille et une nuits (Thousand and One Nights) on eighteenth-century European literatures. He attributes this in part to the collection’s artistically stimulating “generic instability”, as well as to its treasure trove of novel characters, plots, settings and narrative techniques. In his analyses of works by Jean Paul Bignon, Jacques Cazotte and Jean Potocki, Van Leeuwen argues how the Nights became an important reference point in discussions about the nature and function of fiction and the relationship between realism and imagination in literature.

Helene Høyrup turns to the eventyr of Hans Christian Andersen, characterizing them as hybrid, Romantic-Realist “miniature novels” that also anticipate features of twentieth-century Modernism. Highly innovative in their use of language (fusing the colloquial with the literary) and narratorial positions (addressing a dual audience of children and adults), Andersen’s tales reflect contemporaneous debates on the future of Danish literature and would leave a notable mark on the formation of the Danish literary canon.

Daniel Gicu likewise discusses the relationship between fairy tales and the nineteenth-century creation of national literatures in his chapter on Romania’s earliest folk- and fairy-tale collections. He details how collectors...
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and editor-authors such as Arthur and Albert Schott, Nicolae Filimon and Petre Ispirescu took their cue from the Brothers Grimm to create an "authentic" narrative heritage for the Romanian nation. As had also been the case with the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, this entailed an intense editing process, as well as the elaboration of a specific literary style that was meant to showcase the "inherently poetic qualities" of the Romanian people.

Maria Casado Villanueva sheds light on the connection between the fairy tale and the British Modernist short story. She argues that, while the two might appear strange bedfellows at first, the fairy tale's other-worldly atmosphere and adherence to established narrative conventions provided Modernist authors with a stock of marvelous elements with which to undermine literary realism and with recognizable plots to be deconstructed for the sake of readerly defamiliarization. She then puts her theoretical framework to use in two case studies, respectively on D.H. Lawrence's *The Horse Dealer's Daughter* (1922) and Catherine Mansfield's *The Tiredness of Rosabel* (1920).

Michelle Ryan-Sautour's contribution deals with the author and visual artist Rikki Ducornet, especially the latter's *Complete Butcher's Tales* (1994) and *The One Marvelous Thing* (2008). Wavering on the edges of the fairy tale, the nineteenth-century nonsense-tradition, Surrealism, magical realism and the short story, Ducornet's prose is characterized by a generic and linguistic defamiliarization, which according to Ryan-Sautour goes hand in hand with a marvel-inducing experience of language itself, including its visual representations.

Finally, Willem de Blécourt tackles the interaction between tradition and experimentation in the multi-medial family of narratives concerning Hansel and Gretel. His focal point is the Norwegian director Tommy Wirkola's *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013). Though this film was widely panned by critics, De Blécourt proposes that it nonetheless makes for an interesting case study in intergeneric fairy-tale adaptation on account of its savvy use and transformation of older depictions of witchcraft in popular belief, literature and film that are in themselves foreign to the fairy-tale tradition.

On top of these twelve chapters, we have chosen to include an interview with Rikki Ducornet by Michelle Ryan-Sautour, who in her other contribution firmly situates the former's oeuvre at the vanguard of contemporary fiction. Ducornet presented and discussed samples of her work at the 2012 *Fairy-Tale Vanguard* conference in Ghent, alongside other acclaimed writers and illustrators, including Carll Cneut, Peter Verhelst and Bernard Dewulf. By reproducing this interview here, we...
Introduction

I want to offer just a glimmer of the kind of interesting dialogues that took place during that event.

To say that this book is long overdue would be an understatement. My sincere thanks go to our contributors for their angelic patience and sustained efforts, to our respondents for their thorough but speedy replies, to Vanessa Joosen, who was there at the earliest conception of this project, and especially to Anna Kérchy who, by volunteering as my frabjous co-editor, gave it the extra push it needed.

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PART ONE

METALITERARY REFLECTIONS
CHAPTER ONE

THE MODERNIST POLITICAL AGENDA

OF THE FIRST

CONTES DE FÉES:

MADEMOISELLE LHÉRITIER, 

MADAME D’AULNOY, 

AND MADAME DE MURAT’S PARATEXTS

SOPHIE RAYNARD

Mademoiselle Lhéritier’s prefatory dedications and her afterwords, Madame

d’Aulnoy’s frame tales in which her fairy tales are embedded, and

Madame de Murat’s famous introductory epistle preceding one of her

fairy-tale collections are the only theoretical paratexts discussing the

completely new fairy-tale vogue that these authors initiated in the 1690s.

In this study, I will explain how these three early

conteuses

or pioneers of

the genre intended to define that new literary product to the public, in

particular, how they marketed the fairy tale as modern and worthy

literature. But first let us describe the politico-cultural climate of the times

in order to better understand the position that women writers may have

taken and to what aim. We shall try and highlight the opportunity that the

Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns represented for the women

of letters.

Fairy Tales as a Point of Argumentation in the Quarrel

between the Ancients and the Moderns
Robert attributed a social role to the fairy tale in that it was used by the elite as a sign of mutual intellectual recognition. Robert had also stressed a second advantage inherent in that imaginative literary genre: the fairy tale was a perfect medium for literary experimentation. The idea of critical freedom was important to the Moderns as expressed in their quarrel against the Ancients because they saw it as proof of human progress. In his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds, 1686), academician Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle claimed equality between the Ancients and the Moderns on the basis of the universality of human nature. He even went as far as suggesting the Moderns' superiority on the basis of the theory of evolution, the Moderns having the advantage of capitalizing on the inventions made by their ancestors and thus surpassing them. The Moderns (such as Perrault and Fontenelle) also unfavorably compared the two sides on the matter of style, taste, and moral propriety. Thus, in Charles Perrault's *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (Parallel between Ancients and Moderns, 1688-1692), the Abbé criticized the obscenity of antique fables:

> These Milesian fables are so puerile, that it is honoring them enough to oppose them to Donkey Skin- and Mother Goose-tales, or they are so full of iniquities (saletés) like the *Golden Ass* by Lucian or Apuleius […].

It is clear by this quote, put in the mouth of Perrault's modernist advocate, that the "new" fairy tales were created to promote the cause of the Moderns, at least by Perrault.

### The Theoretical Writings Critiquing the Fairy-Tale Vogue

- *Entretiens sur les contes de fées* (Conversations about Contes de Fées)
- *Entretiens sur les tragédies de ce temps* (Conversations on Tragedies of Our Times)
views, thus it is not surprising to understand the women writers' modernist position in the quarrel, as this comment from Villiers implies:

Most women only enjoy reading because they enjoy laziness and triviality; not only in the provinces, but also in Paris and at the court one finds this taste for frivolous books among women. Everything that requires a little effort tires and bores them; they amuse themselves with a book in the same way they play with a fly or a ribbon. So does it astonish you that tales and little stories are popular? (Villiers, *Entretiens sur les contes de fées*, excerpt from the fifth conversation trans. in Bottigheimer 208)

Villiers's *Entretiens sur les contes de fées et sur quelques autres ouvrages du temps, pour servir de préservatif contre le mauvais goût* (*Conversations about Contes de Fées and Some Other Works of Our Time, to serve as an antidote to bad taste*) were dedicated to the gentlemen of the French Academy in order to dissuade bad authors to compose frivolous works and incite others to only write excellent works. The problem with Villiers' critique of *contes de fées* is that it is based on the premise that they have been written for children, just like the antique fables they oppose to them:

THE PROVINCIAL: I am not comparing Aesop's *Fables* with *contes de fées* at all. For those fables, it was necessary to have all the wit, all the delicacy, and the good sense, and even all the knowledge of an excellent philosopher. But for a *conte de fées*, what is necessary? There is no sense for reason; these are very frivolous tales that nurses invented to amuse children.

THE PARISIAN: You judge *contes de fées* in just the same way as those who have written so many recently. They believed that these tales required neither reason nor good sense, and they succeeded perfectly in giving them that character. Most of them have even forgotten what you said, that these tales were invented for children. They made them so lengthy and wrote in so complex a style, that even the children were bored with them (Villiers trans. in Bottigheimer 212).

Yet, someone like Lhéritier insisted on the importance of morals in *contes de fées* for one thing and alluded to the adult reception for another, when she reports that she had been “in the company of persons of distinguished merit, whose conversation fell on the topic of poems, tales, and short stories” and that they had commented and praised Perrault’s first tales–“Griselidis” (“Griselda”) and “Les Souhaits ridicules” (“The Ridiculous Wishes”) are named –, after which she had taken her turn to tell a tale and presented “Marmoisan” “with some embellishment”
The Modernist Political Agenda of the First Contes de Fées

It having come to her mind "in the spur of the moment" (Lhéritier, "Preface to 'Marmoisan" trans. in Bottigheimer 131):

We spent a great deal of time arguing about [short stories]. It was also said that however beautiful those works might be in their respective genre, they were nonetheless lesser productions originating from the hand of their famous author, who had given so many marks of his great talent for poetry and eloquence, and whose brilliant insights in the sciences and all the fine arts everyone knew (Ibid.).

This is another way for Lhéritier to say that fairy-tale authors may be very talented authors to begin with, and because of that prerogative, even their minor productions are worth something.1

By contrast, this is how Villiers presents the situation:

THE PROVINCIAL: […] you will agree that the best tales we have are the ones that imitate the style and the simplicity of nurses most closely; it is only for this reason that you seem pleased by the ones attributed to the son of a famous Academician (Villiers trans. in Bottigheimer 220).

So, just like the distinguished company to which Lhéritier presented her tale and within whom Perrault's tales were very well received, Villiers also appreciated the naïve charm of Perrault's writings as well as the solidity of his morals. However, this is where he stops his praise. Indeed, he does not mention Lhéritier's analogous contributions, and even condemns quite explicitly the stylistic puerility of Aulnoy's when he says:

THE PARISIAN: You believe that these authors "ignorant people possessed by the desire to write books" think that their books are worthless?

THE PROVINCIAL: Yes, and I even think that they admit it. I have heard tell of a lady who has written some of these contes de fées and is the first to mock them and the bookstores and the readers who buy them. She says everywhere that this is the worse merchandise in the world, but after all people want them, she says, they pay me well, I'll give them as many as they want. (Villiers trans. in Bottigheimer 211)

1 Bottigheimer argues that the Abbé de Villiers praised Perrault's fairy-tale productions probably because Perrault was one of the dedicatees of his volume (207). Here, too, Lhéritier could be praising her uncle for diplomatic reasons because, as we can see from the women writers' metaliterary comments (Lhéritier's, Aulnoy's, and Murat's), those ladies chose quite a different path in writing their stories and portraying themselves as authors.
Villiers would characterize the Ancients’ style as natural and the conteuses as artificial and infantile. Yet, by contrast, the Moderns considered Homer’s type of natural too trivial and mundane. They obviously had profound disagreements in matters of style and reception.

2. Pierre-Valentin Faydit’s *La Télémacomanie* (Telemachomania) (1700)

Abbé Faydit, although the least known of the opponents to the fairy-tale vogue, is perhaps the most virulent of all. His loss of legacy in fairy-tale studies may be due to the fact that his theories are not compiled in an essay directly addressing that genre. It is indirectly, in his *La Télémacomanie, ou la Censure et critique du roman intitulé Les Aventures de Télémaque* (Telemachomania, or Censure and Critique of the Novel entitled *Telemachus*, 1700), a volume constituting a systematic criticism of François Fénelon’s famous novel *Télémaque* (Telemachus 1699), that one can find his personal comments on the contemporary fairy-tale vogue. Faydit’s attack on the ‘marvelous’ in Fénelon applies just as much to the fairy tale: it is a type of marvelous based on sentimental Romanesque, a type of poetics he happened to loath for being too corny and facetious, and the fairy tale was in his opinion its worst expression. He opposed Homer’s simplicity to such artificiality. The fact is that Faydit was against the marvelous in general, not even sparing Perrault in his acerb criticism, and openly condemning the works of the conteuses as being intellectually despicable and undignified. Yet, he conceded in his concluding arguments that the conteuses (he specifically mentions the names of Mademoiselle de La Force and Madame de Murat) did possess some wit and nobility, while Perrault had a fertile imagination—a mere concession that was made all too late in a book otherwise quite vindictive against the fairy tale and its authors.

3. Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde’s *Lettres curieuses de littérature et de morale* (Particular Letters on Literature and Morals) (1702)

Another religious man of letters, a former Jesuit who turned to Cartesianism, Abbé de Bellegarde wrote dialogues and moral treatises for the elite. The third letter in his *Lettres curieuses de littérature et de morale par M. l’Abbé de Bellegarde* (The Letters of Monsieur l’abbé de Bellegarde) (1702) addresses the moral differences between the Ancients and the Moderns and deals with the fairy tale among other topics. He is prompted to do so by a Lady from the court, the famous Duchess of Maine, nicknamed Ludovie (after a famous fairy), who poses theoretical