Seventeenth-century French fairy tales are considered to have brought about the institutionalization of the genre. This paternity, or more appropriately maternity, argued first by Jack Zipes, is widely recognized and accepted now. Yet they can be surprising in their conclusions since they do not necessarily reiterate the typical happy ending generally associated with the genre.

According to Raymonde Robert, in *Le conte de fées littéraire en France de la fin du XVIIᵉ à la fin du XVIIIᵉ siècle*, one of the three principles defining “l’écriture féerique” is that at the beginning of literary fairy tales, the scene of gift giving from the fairies makes the explicit assertion, before it even happens, that any misfortune, lack or deception will be resolved at the end of the tale, ensuring its happy ending (36-7). Vladimir Propp, in *Morphologie du conte*, working with a larger body of Russian folk and fairy tales,¹ also concurs that the villain will be punished (U) and the hero rewarded (W), the two concluding functions of fairy tales (78).

However, in seventeenth-century’s fairyland, heroes’ and villains’ fates are not so clear: sometimes they are simply tragic, and on occasion the road to happiness takes some unexpected or even divergent paths. Several tales from d’Aulnoy, Perrault, Bernard and La Force exemplify these unconventional endings, and allow us to understand why these models of modern fairytales don’t fit a modern theory of fairy tale analysis like Propp’s. In order to do so, we have to ask a series of questions: for whom were these fairy tales written and what was the context of their creation? What message underlies these tales’ denouements? Did the non-conventional

---

¹ Propp specifies that he works with the body of marvelous tales comprised in the Aarne and Thompson index under the Type numbers 300 and 749 (28). All the tales studied here also belong to these types.
ending of certain of the most popular fairy tales in the 1690s respond to reader expectation of the period or was it, as it is now, a surprising ending?

The first tale I would like to draw attention to is “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge”, published by Perrault in 1697. It is important to start with this author because he is often considered as the black sheep of the group of tellers. “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” is not the most widely disseminated version, which has been supplanted in the collective memory by the Grimms’ adaptation. Perrault’s ending is tragic, since the heroine and her grandmother get eaten by the wolf, and do not escape their fate as do the Grimms’ heroines. Here, Petit chaperon rouge just dies, and her destiny is not even caused by any faulty behavior on her part. She was not told to stay on the path, to beware of strangers, or to stay away from the wolf, as was her German counterpart. Her fate is the result of her mother’s negligence and the wrong education she gives to her daughter, as emphasized in the morals. The mother, even more than the accessorial but non-prosecuted criminal wolf, constitutes the villain in the tale; nevertheless she stays unpunished, except for the loss of her daughter.

In Perrault’s version of “Cendrillon”, published in 1697, the heroine wins a kingdom at the end, so it constitutes a happy ending according to Propp’s function W. On the other hand, the villains, being in this tale the stepsisters, instead of being punished for the ill-treatment of their stepsister as in the Grimms’ version, receive some courtly lords as husbands from the hands of Cendrillon, who “était aussi bonne que belle” (was as good as she was pretty). The morals stresses the “bonne grâce” (good disposition) of the heroine, a true gift from the fairies. Mme d’Aulnoy, in “Finette Cendron”, a fusion of the storylines of Perrault’s “Petit Poucet” and “Cendrillon”, published in 1698, goes further than Perrault: it is not just lords that the sisters receive from the heroine’s hands, but true kings. D’Aulnoy stresses the magnanimity of her heroine, not without similarities with the behavior of Louis XIV, who was, in the eyes of the countess, superior enough to forgive his enemies. But the tale “Finette Cendron” adds an element to Perrault’s ending which is not without incongruity in the context of the seventeenth century. While Perrault’s prince, upon seeing Cendrillon “encore plus belle que jamais” (prettier than ever), marries her the next day, d’Aulnoy’s Finette Cendron negotiates her marriage contract by first telling her story, and then returning her parents to their kingdom, which had long ago been seized by her future in-laws. This reflects Jean Mainil’s

---

2 Considered as a fairy tale (T 333), it is however a cautionary tale representing a rite of passage.

3 All translations are mine.
thesis in Madame d'Aulnoy et le rire des fées: essai sur la subversion féerique et le merveilleux comique sous l'Ancien Régime, in which he argues that the countess doesn’t hesitate to have her female protagonist question social norms with respect to women.

In regard to marriage, Bernard’s “Riquet à la Houppe”, published in 1696, a year before Perrault’s version, is a good example of a fairy tale gone badly. Mama, the beautiful but idiotic heroine, daughter of a Spanish lord, gains intelligence from the gnome Riquet in exchange for becoming his wife within a year. With beauty and wits, she acquires a lover at her father’s court. But she is terribly tortured by the fact that if she disobeys Riquet and doesn’t become his wife, she will become stupid again and lose her lover. She therefore decides to marry Riquet in order to keep her wits, but with a subterfuge, brings her lover to her underground kingdom. Riquet discovers the stratagem, and renders the princess brainless during the day and witty at night when she is with him. She counteracts her fate by putting her husband into a deep sleep with magic herbs she places under his nose. Then, she spends the night with her lover, while she sleeps through her idiocy all day. Of course, Riquet discovers the hoax once again, and with a touch of his magic wand, reshapes the lover into his own shape. The poor princess doesn’t know which is the lover and which is the husband, but it doesn’t matter, says the conteuse, because “les amants à la longue deviennent des maris” (with time, lovers become husbands.) Although the hideous and devious gnome qualifies as the villain, the happy ending is reserved for him, while the constant and true love between the heroine and her gallant is ridiculed by the teller’s own cynicism.

This attitude towards true love is counteracted by Mlle de La Force’s fairy tales: characters that should be considered as villains turn into heroes and are rewarded against all expectation in the end. In “L'Enchanteur”, published in 1698, an adulterous queen is at first punished by her son, the fruit of her disloyal loves, but is rewarded in the end: she marries her lover and they spend the rest of their lives together in her (deceased) husband’s castle.

As for Persinette, heroine of the eponymous tale, also published by Mlle de La Force in 1698, she is guilty of having sex outside of wedlock and sent to exile. But she is saved from imminent death with her lover and their two children by the fairy she deceived, who brings them to the lover’s castle where they will live happily ever after. These heroines are disloyal creatures who should be punished for their misbehavior, according to the laws of the genre and of the era. But in La Force’s fairyland, love is stronger than the power of the fairies, no matter how guilty the characters are. Whatever the endings, or the paths the heroines take to come to their fate, all these fairy
tales, and many more, are associated with three motives that govern the century: sex, love and marriage.

Of course these fairy tales were never intended for a child, despite what Perrault tried to make us believe. Imported from Italy in the 1560s, with the translations of Straparola’s *Piacevole notti*, the fashion of retelling fairy tales in the elite milieu preceded their written composition by more than twenty years, and it was at Versailles in the sixties and seventies that they became popular as a courtly pass-time. Tales shaped on the same model as d’Aulnoy’s “L’Ile de la Félicité” (the first one to be published in 1690, also ending sadly) were already told, retold and passed down when the tellers of the end of the century started to publish them. The frame narratives of the published fairy tales by women also mirror this sixties and seventies “mitonnage” of the court, and not the traditional settings of tale-telling as it is found in Straparola. While it can easily be argued that Perrault’s fairy tales were written to educate the growing bourgeoisie of the end of the seventeenth century, women’s tales, which account for two-thirds of all the published fairy tales of the period, were exclusively written for their peers, that is, aristocratic women-tellers, and court and salon aficionados. According to Mme de Murat, Mme d’Aulnoy wrote her best fairy tales in her salon amidst her friends (*Journal pour Mademoiselle des Menou*, 1709). These women-tellers are all descendant of the précieux milieu, some of them old enough at the end of the century to have participated in précieux salons of the sixties and seventies, and some, like L’Héritier and Murat, were their intellectual daughters (L’Héritier was affiliated with Scudéry). It is therefore in the context of preciosity that we have to consider this body of fairy tales.

It is preciosity not so much in term of literature but in term of moral code that is of interest here, and I refer to Paul Bénichou’s *Morales du grand

---

4. See Madame de Sévigné’s letter to her daughter in which she describes how one tells tales to amuse courtly women, which is called “mitonner” (Livry, 6 août 1677. Vol II, 516). See Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender in France 1690-1715*, note 25 (230).

5. In Boccaccio, Marguerite de Navarre, Straparola, Basile, and others, the frame story always implies a group of people forced into a situation, and the telling of the tales serves either to save their life, or to pass the time while their situation is being resolved. In the 1690’s frame stories, it is always for the sole purpose of divertissement that the group engages in telling fairy tales, reproducing the “mitonnage” at Louis XIV’s court.

6. A bourgeois himself, and deeply involved in the bourgeois politics of the time, his fairy tales often involve plebeian heroes versus the princes and princesses of the women’s tales.
siècle for this distinction (247-248). In the women tellers’ fairy tales discussed here as well as in many others, heroines are subjected to parental (whether real parents or substitutes) and marital ownership, oppression, sequestration in towers, or marriage without their love and consent. The main purpose of these fairy tales and the message underlying their denouements are to open the road to women’s emancipation. To quote Joan DeJean in Tender Geographies, “Scudéry’s salon writing was the first indication of the new politics of marriage and married life that would be the dominant concern of French women’s fiction until the 1820s” (92). In this perspective, we find that fairy tales are reproducing the earlier teachings of Sapho and Clélie, found in one of their conversations: for Sapho, marriage is a long legal slavery for women, and the best way for love to be eternal is that it be detached from wedlock. As for Clélie, the only possible condition for marriage would be that the wedding contract be done according to the terms proposed by the lady (episode of Brutus & Lucrece, Vol. II, 1654). In this context, d’Aulnoy’s Finette Cendron’s negotiation of her wedding contract makes eminent sense, while Perrault’s ending of Cendrillon, whose wedding is decided entirely by the prince and his family, is to be avoided. Bernard’s pessimistic ending also abounds in précieux ethics: once the lover is established in the heart and in the house of a lady, therefore once the lady is attached to her lover, love becomes an ownership, l’amour courtois leaves the premises and the lovers are only left with the burden of wedlock. As for La Force’s heroines, the adulterous queen of “L’Enchanteur” was forced into wedlock without her consent, and happened to find true love on her wedding night with another man, while Persinette was locked up in a tower where she innocently became married to her lover, not knowing exactly what it meant. None of them committed crimes against love according to the précieux morals code, and consequently they do not deserve to be punished, since it is this type of true love, outside of wedlock, that is advocated.

If this ideal of courtly love and the emancipation of women found an approving reception in aristocratic and salon milieus, it was not to please everyone, and certainly not the growing bourgeoisie. As argued by Sophie Raynard in La Seconde préciosité: Floraison des conteuses de 1690 à 1756, while women are questioning traditional values and social norms within the necessary theme of love, Perrault’s values promoted in his tales revolve around social and material success (127). The ending of “Le Petit chaperon

---

7 See also Raynard, La seconde préciosité: Floraison des conteuses de 1690 à 1756; Trinquet, La petite histoire des contes de fées littéraires en France (1690-1705).
8 See Trinquet, La petite histoire des contes de fées littéraires en France (1690-1705) (17).
“rouge” illustrates these values. The heroine, being “raped” by the wolf, loses her market value and needs to be outcast from society, in which she no longer has a role to play. The message underlying the denouement is that her symbolic death represents the menace of giving the wrong education to women, as it is emphasized in the morals. It stresses bourgeois ethics based on prudence, as opposed to the “heroic” ethics – love and honor – of the aristocracy.

We thus find that fairy tales’ reception was divided into two groups: on the one hand, the aristocratic and salon milieu promoting an ideal love coming from courteous and novelistic literature, and on the other, the mercantilist bourgeois milieu, advocating its ideal education with the right place for women in a world dominated by men. The position of these two factions is supported by numerous contemporary texts in both camps. And what we see now as a homogenous fashioning of fairy tales including “Perrault and his émules” was in fact divided from the mid 1690s by an animosity from the women towards Perrault and from Perrault towards women’s fairy tales. For the women tellers did not conceive fairy tales the way Perrault wrote them: summarizing L’Héritier’s and Murat’s views, his were too short, too vulgar, and did not respond to reader or listener expectations of the time. The women tellers believed they were the depository of the fairytale tradition as it was at Louis XIV’s court, so their attacks against Perrault were not as formulated and as pertinent as Perrault’s against their tales. Of course, none of these women belonged to the French Academy, and the literary genres in which they were thriving being on the margins of the canon did not give them much credit outside of their realm.

Perrault, on the other hand, deployed sufficient artillery during the nineties and especially in the Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes, to make sure that his model of fairy tales would be regarded by posterity as the only viable one. This view is corroborated by L’Abbé de Villiers’s Entretien sur les contes de fées, published in 1699, a year that can be considered the end of the first fairy tale fashion. By taking a different path from the traditional one of the women tellers, Perrault also worked as a visionary, whether consciously or not, by understanding that the future would be in the hands of the climbing bourgeoisie rather than in those of an impoverished aristo-

---

9 See Murat’s “Dedicace aux Fées Modernes”, in Histoires Sublimes et Allégoriques (non numérotée, 1699); Murat’s Voyage de Campagne 173, 1699, L’Héritier’s Œuvres Meslees 180, 294, 1696; Contes anglois, préface (dernière page, non numérotée, 1705); quoted in Trinquet, La petite histoire des contes de fées littéraires en France (1690-1705) (45-59).
cracy.\textsuperscript{10} His tales are therefore a hybrid between the vogue that produced most of the fairy tales of the period and the ones that will be found in every European home, 150 years later. Not yet completely suitable for a child audience, they were nevertheless promoting values in which the future centuries could recognize themselves. In the hands of Madame Le Prince de Beaumont, and especially in those of the Grimms, who rewrote Perrault’s and some women’s tales, and added happy endings with a morals intended for children and not their parents, fairy tales finally convey a perfect model of bourgeois ideals, encouraging the virtue of their heroes and punishing the vices of their villains.\textsuperscript{11}

This is not to say that women’s fairy tales did not cross over the centuries; in fact, d’Aulnoy’s fairy tales were more frequently published and translated in the eighteenth century than Perrault’s. But if we look at the destiny of the entire corpus of fairy tales of the late seventeenth century after the publication of \textit{Le Cabinet des Fées} in 1885-89, we arrive at three observations: first, Perrault’s tales are often published in books, and several of the best tales by women were included in these publications, under his name. Second, many tales from d’Aulnoy, L’Héritier, La Force and others were republished, usually truncated, into chapbooks. Third, from the mid-nineteenth century, thanks to the publication of millions of chapbooks a year, distributed over the entire French territories, the variations of the women’s tales are entirely refolklorized and purged from their seventeenth-century messages. These shorter and simpler tales often end in a conventional way that has blinded modern critics into thinking that their existence was anterior to the seventeenth-century publications.\textsuperscript{12} While passing from elite hands to the peasantry, they have incorporated elements of bourgeois virtues in the same way the Grimms rewrote seventeenth-century fairy tales for the sake of the German folk.

The history of fairy tales could then be divided into two great moments: their institutionalization at the court of Louis XIV and their socialization, by which I mean their entering into pop culture in the nineteenth century. Cautionary tales for adults evolved into optimistic children’s stories cele-

\textsuperscript{10} As a member of Colbert’s government, and as part of the Duc d’Orléans’s court, he was very well aware of the changes that were taking place in French society, including the switch of power from the hands of the aristocracy to the ones of the ascending bourgeoisie to which he belonged.


brating good behavior by promising a better future, and correspondingly punishing bad behavior according to new laws of education. In this perspective, sex, as is underlined in Perrault’s “Petit chaperon rouge”, is replaced by gluttony in “Rotkäppchen”.

Sex, as is promoted in La Force’s tales, finds little place in a bourgeois and devout nineteenth century. Persinette, for instance, doesn’t have such good fortune in the French folk versions of the tale. Out of 17 versions, she is punished ten times, forgiven four times, and three of the versions are continued with the ending of d’Aulnoy’s “Chatte blanche” (T. 402). In the Grimms’ “Rapunzel”, a watered-down version compared to La Force’s “Persinette”, the witch, replacing the fairy, is not to be seen after she exiles Persinette and tricks the husband-lover into blindness, so there is no inconvenient forgiveness to be pronounced on her part. “Le Magicien” however, has left no traces in folklore.

We come back now to our first query, which will conclude this article: why doesn’t the model of seventeenth-century French fairy tales, for which half of the corpus is considered folkloric, fit a theory as widely used as Propp’s functions? This is a problem we all face when doing interdisciplinary research today, using theories that have been implemented when disciplinary borders were not really permeable. Vladimir Propp, when looking at a pan-European body of fairy tales and defining its functions, was working with a corpus of already altered nineteenth-century fairy tales which embodied two centuries of changes. Seventeenth-century fairy tales, as any fairy tale, are so linked to their cultural context that not only their endings don’t make sense to the modern reader, but it is difficult to apply theories that have been developed based on a body of texts which, although belonging to the same tale types, reflects another culture and another era. So can we still use Propp’s functions to understand the grand siècle cautionary fairy tales? I would answer, with caution. It would rather be more efficient to combine the disciplines of Folklore and Literature in order to create more dynamic socio-historical theories that would take into consideration both ends of the development of the fairytale genre from the early-modern era to this day.
Works Cited


