Losing Love, Losing Hope: Unhappy Endings in Seventeenth-Century Fairy Tales

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One of the defining features of the fairy tale genre is the orderly resolution of narrative conflict with a happy ending that rewards heroic characters and punishes villains (Propp 63-4). The conventional happy ending, which became institutionalised as a defining feature of the genre during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is the celebration of a marriage between the heroic couple (Robert 46-7). But even as the seventeenth-century French fairy tale vogue established the marriage closure as the dominant fairy tale ending, a number of the tales written during this period do not follow this pattern. Tales by Marie-Catherine le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness d'Aulnoy, Catherine Bernard and Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, Countess de Murat, end unhappily with separation, death or disappointment. In d'Aulnoy’s “L'Île de la Félicité”, “Le Mouton”, and “Le Nain Jaune”, the union of the heroic couple is destroyed by the death of one, or both, of the lovers. Thwarted or unrequited love is the source of tragedy in Murat’s “Anguillette”, “Peine Perdue”, and “L'Aigle au beau bec”. Loving union fails to produce eternal bliss for the heroic couples in Bernard’s “Le Prince Rosier”, and Murat’s “Le Palais de la Vengeance”.¹

Love, in particular the suffering caused by love, is a central theme in the unhappy endings written by d'Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat. This paper focuses on the idea that the disappearance of love is the reason the heroic couple is denied a happy ending. There are two different scenarios in which love disappears. In d’Aulnoy’s tales and Murat’s tales of unrequited or

¹ Tale citations refer to the following edited collections: Madame d'Aulnoy: Contes des Fées suivis des Contes nouveaux ou Les Fées à la Mode, ed. Nadine Jasmin; Contes: Madame de Murat, ed. Geneviève Patard; and Contes: Mademoiselle Lhéritier, Mademoiselle Bernard, Mademoiselle de la Force, Madame Durand, Madame d'Auneuil, ed. Raymonde Robert. All translations are my own.

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thwarted love, unhappy endings are caused by the disappearance of a lover who either dies or marries someone else. In these tales, perfect love is an unattainable ideal that can only ever be temporarily experienced by men and women living in the human world. The second type of unhappy ending is caused by the disappearance of love itself, and marriage is identified as the cause of this disappearance in Bernard’s “Le Prince Rosier”, and Murat’s “Le Palais de la Vengeance”. In examining these two scenarios of loss, my paper analyses the causal relationship between the disappearance of love and the unhappy endings written by d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat. In other words, this paper examines how d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat deny the possibility of a happy ending and what that tells us about the politics of love and marriage embedded in their unhappy endings.

And they lived unhappily ever after...

Raymonde Robert’s *Le conte de fées littéraire en France: De la fin du XVIIe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* identifies the happy ending restoring order and fulfilling the exemplary destiny of the heroic couple as a central feature of the fairy tale genre (35). This identification of the generic importance of the happy ending draws on Vladimir Propp’s work on the functions of Russian folklore and fairy tales, in which punishment of villains (U), and marriage and elevation in the status of the hero (W) are the final two functions (63-4). As a symbolic representation of the heroic couple’s triumph over obstacles to their union, the marriage closure became the dominant ending in the fairy tales published during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Robert 46-7). The prominent role of the happy ending in the French fairy tale tradition has been discussed by scholars including Nadine Jasmin, Sophie Raynard and Patricia Hannon. While Jasmin and Raynard interpret unhappy endings as challenges to the narrative logic of the genre (Jasmin, *Naissance du conte féminin* 480-94; Raynard 197-214), Hannon goes further, suggesting that use of the marriage closure is, at best, “merely an ironic closure” that cannot contain the subversive content of tales written by seventeenth-century French women (163).

As recent scholarship examining the French fairy tales written at the end of the seventeenth century has acknowledged, unconventional endings that deviate from the marriage closure model form a small but significant

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2 See also Marie-Agnès Thirard’s analysis of “Le Nain Jaune” and “Le Mouton” as examples of d’Aulnoy’s resistance of the implicit generic demand of a happy ending (214-16).
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proportion of the tales published by women. According to Charlotte Trinquet, these unconventional endings do not follow Propp’s model of the happy ending. Instead of providing the anticipated marriage closure, unconventional tales end by rewarding characters who transgress moral or social norms, or with tragedy for the hero or heroine (45-6). Nine of the forty-one tales written by d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat, approximately 20%, end unhappily with the heroic couple experiencing death, or pain and suffering. This number increases if it includes tales with unconventional endings, such as those that implicitly or explicitly question seventeenth-century moral codes regarding love and marriage. However, as noted by Lewis C. Seifert, the inaugural status of the corpus of seventeenth-century fairy tales complicates use of the term “conventional” to analyse tales written at a time when features of the genre were still being developed (66-7). Given that the marriage closure was not an established convention of the genre at the time d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat wrote their tales, this paper interprets their choice not to end all of their tales happily as a socio-political decision rather than a literary one.

The questions raised by a socio-political reading of tales by d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat encompass two key issues. First, what ideas about love does the absence of the marriage closure seek to convey? And second, what are the social implications of the representation of the disappearance of love as an irresolvable problem inevitably leading to a tragic end? This paper reads the unhappy endings written by d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat as examples of a pessimism about love that questioned the politics of love and

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3 Trinquet provides a detailed analysis of unconventional endings in seventeenth-century French fairy tales by d’Aulnoy, Bernard, Charles Perrault, and Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force (45-52). Seifert’s “On Fairy Tales, Subversion, and Ambiguity” reflects on the development of the marriage closure as the conventional fairy tale ending, and on the difficulty of interpreting ambiguity in the conteuses’ use of this ending (65-8). See Jasmin’s “Amour, Amour, Ne Nous Abandonne Point” on the theme of les malheurs de l’amour in the fairy tales written by women (227-31).

4 This calculation is based on Raymonde Robert’s “Tableau des contes de fées publiées de 1690 à 1709” (Jasmin, Madame d’Aulnoy 61-5), and my evaluation of the tales written by d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat. I classified tales that ended with a favorable outcome for the heroic couple as happy endings, and tales that ended with death, pain or suffering for the heroic couple as unhappy endings.

5 For example, in d’Aulnoy’s “La Princesse Printanière”, the heroine’s premarital escapades do not prevent her marriage to a prince unaware of her transgression. The heroine in d’Aulnoy’s “Finette Cendron” negotiates the terms of her marriage contract directly with her in-laws. The moral to Murat’s “L’Heureuse Peine” questions whether the heroic couple’s love will survive their marriage.
marriage associated with the seventeenth-century literary salon tradition. This politics, which advocated a radical reformulation of the institution of marriage as a relationship based on mutual affection, idealised a reciprocal, gallant love that sought to reframe the ideals of courtly love for a modern seventeenth-century salon audience (DeJean 90-3). The model of love proposed by this précieux literary tradition rejected the patriarchal legal framework that defined marriage as an institution based on the transfer of control over women from fathers to husbands (Lebrun 300-12). In the fairy tales written by women at the end of the seventeenth-century, this subversive moral code is reflected in tales which, among other things, criticise forced marriages and allow heroines to choose their husbands on the basis of affection and consideration of personal merit rather than social or economic factors (Welch 49-52). I argue, however, that the representation of love as an essential element of marriage does not constitute an uncritical celebration of love as an ennobling emotion with the capacity to emancipate women from structural gender inequalities in seventeenth-century French society.

In the unhappy endings written by d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat, the idealisation of love as a prerequisite to marriage is undermined by the conclusion to each tale where love is lost, denied, or represented as a source of torment. In d’Aulnoy’s tales, Bernard’s “Le Prince Rosier” and Murat’s “Le Palais de la Vengeance”, the heroic couple experiences the tender, faithful love associated with the précieux salon tradition, but this love disappears by the end of each tale. The dream of perfect love remains forever unfulfilled in Murat’s “Anguillaume”, “L’Aigle au beau bec”, and “Peine Perdue”. The tragic consequences experienced by even the most faithful, tender lovers depict love as a problem that cannot be resolved, and marriage as an institution best avoided.

Separation, death and disappointment

The first category of unhappy endings caused by the disappearance of love are tales where the union between the heroic couple is denied by the disappearance of one of the lovers. In d’Aulnoy’s “L’Île de la Félicité”, “Le Mouton”, and “Le Nain Jaune”, death destroys the union of the heroic

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6 See also Trinquet, “Happily Ever After? Not So Easily!” 48-50; Raynard, La seconde préciosité, 197-214, 256-62; Seifert and Stanton, Enchanted Eloquence 29-32.
7 Gérard Gélinas makes a similar point about the representation of love in d’Aulnoy’s tales, arguing that her tales function as a challenge to the myth of “grand amour” popular in seventeenth-century pastoral literature (191-219).
couple. As the author of twenty-five tales published between 1690 and 1698, d’Aulnoy is the most prolific fairy tale author from this period and her tales are often considered to be more optimistic than those by Bernard and Murat (Raynard 209-11). Twenty of d’Aulnoy’s twenty-five tales end with the celebration of a wedding between the heroic couple. Of the five tales that do not follow this pattern, three end unhappily; “Le Pigeon et la Colombe” allows the heroic couple to live together under fairy protection in animal form, and “Le Prince Marcassin” sees the hero marry three times in order to reverse his metamorphosis as a wild boar.

D’Aulnoy’s unhappy endings provide an interesting case study on the absence of the marriage closure as a deliberate authorial choice. In “L’Île de la Félicité”, the hero of the tale is murdered by Father Time when he leaves the heroine to make his name in the world. This disappearance is reversed in “Le Mouton”, where it is the heroine who does not return in time to prevent the hero dying from a broken heart. The ending in “Le Nain Jaune” sees the death of both the heroine and her intended husband. At first glance, the endings to “L’Île de la Félicité”, “Le Mouton”, and “Le Nain Jaune”, seem to fit comfortably within a narrative formula celebrating marriage as the ultimate happy ending, as they can be read as examples of what happens when the anticipated union cannot take place. But for the tragic death of the hero, one might imagine that the heroic couple would otherwise have lived happily ever after. A close analysis of these endings, however, reveals significant ambiguity in d’Aulnoy’s depiction of the perfect love shared by each heroic couple. In each tale, the faithful, reciprocal love shared by the heroic couple does not protect them from tragedy, and d’Aulnoy seems to suggest that such perfect love cannot survive outside of the marvellous utopia of her fairy tales.

In “L’Île de la Félicité”, Princess Félicité and Prince Adolphe experience perfect happiness for 300 years until Adolphe’s desire to make a name for himself in the world causes him to leave Félicité and their utopian paradise in search of glory and fame. Once he leaves Félicité and her island, he is captured and killed by Father Time. But it is not Father Time who causes Adolphe’s death. A close reading of the epitaph dedicated to the unfortunate prince reveals d’Aulnoy’s ambivalence about the ability of humankind to experience the perfect love depicted in her tale:

Le Temps est le maître de tout,
Il n’est rien dont il ne vienne à bout ;
La beauté passe avec les années ;

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8 A number of d’Aulnoy’s happy endings contain subversive elements that destabilise the celebratory nature of the marriage closure (Seifert 67-8).
L’homme forme à la fois mille nouveaux désirs,
Et son esprit se trouble au milieu des plaisirs ;
S’il croit ses peines couronnées,
S’il paraît content quelque jour
D’une conquête qu’il a faite,
Il éprouve bientôt, par des fâcheux retours,
Qu’il ne se trouve point d’éternelles amours
Ni de félicité parfaite. (144)

The final two lines of this verse express d’Aulnoy’s doubt about whether eternal love (d’éternelles amours) or perfect happiness (félicité parfaite) can exist outside of the fairy utopia in her tale. By making Father Time the instrument of Adolphe’s death, d’Aulnoy suggests that love and happiness are transient, impermanent states that will inevitably be displaced by other human desires. Adolphe’s death is therefore inevitable. He cannot remain forever in Félicité’s island paradise because it is an enchanted state of stasis in which humans do not belong. The perfect love between Adolphe and Félicité exists only in this paradise and it is lost as soon as Adolphe leaves.

The tragic ending to “Le Mouton” echoes the tale of paradise lost in “L’Île de la Félicité”. In this tale, the heroine, Princess Merveilleuse, is exiled to a forest where she meets and falls in love with the eponymous hero, a ram who is in fact a metamorphosed prince. In contrast to “L’Île de la Félicité”, it is the heroine who decides to leave her lover to attend her sister’s wedding, and when she is delayed from returning, he dies of a broken heart. Again we have a tale of loss provoked by the intrusion of the outside world into the utopian paradise created by the heroic couple’s love. The rhyming moral at the end of this tale raises some interesting questions about the role of love in this unhappy ending:

Souvent les plus beaux dons des Cieux
Ne servent qu’à notre ruine,
Le mérite éclatant que l’on demande aux dieux,
Quelquefois de nos maux est la triste origine :
Le roi Mouton eût moins souffert,
S’il n’eût point allumé cette flamme fatale
...
Il haïssait sans feinte, aimait sans artifice,
Et ne ressemblait pas aux hommes d’aujourd’hui :
Sa fin même pourra nous paraître fort rare,
Et ne convient qu’au roi Mouton :
On n’en voit point dans ce canton
Mourir quand leur brebis s’égare. (425)
The moral to this tale is simultaneously nostalgic—claiming that the hero’s faithful and sincere love does not resemble the sentiments of seventeenth-century men—and fatalistic—suggesting that blessings from heaven tend to cause suffering rather than happiness. According to d’Aulnoy, the hero’s love is a fatal flame that causes him to suffer a fate he does not deserve. But there is a note of humour in the final lines of this verse, with d’Aulnoy comparing the behaviour of gallant lovers to that of a ram and his sheep. This burlesque parody locates the tale in an ideal past, rendering the exaggerated devotion of the hero an outmoded behavioural code (Jasmin, *Naissance du conte féminin* 275-8).

Unlike Félicité and Merveilleuse, heroines to whom d’Aulnoy attributes no blame for the death of their lovers, the moral to “Le Nain Jaune” criticises the heroine, Princess Toute Belle, for making a promise she had no intention to keep. Toute Belle’s promise to marry the eponymous antagonist, which she attempts to evade by becoming engaged to a more powerful suitor, is the subject of d’Aulnoy’s censure:

Tel qui promet dans le naufrage  
Une hécate!ome aux Immortels,  
Ne va pas seulement embrasser leurs autels  
Quand il se voit sur le rivage.  
Chacun promet dans le danger:  
Mais le destin de Toute Belle  
T’apprend à ne point t’engager,  
Si ton cœur aux serments ne peut être fidèle. (563)

Although Toute Belle believed she would be killed by lions if she did not agree to marry the Nain Jaune, d’Aulnoy does not absolve her lack of fidelity. The ending to this tale is curious, given d’Aulnoy’s idealisation of the virtues of tender love in “L’Île de la Félicité” and “Le Mouton”. Toute Belle’s tender passion for the King of Mines d’Or, which is inspired by his merit, esprit, and delicate sentiments as well as his “belle âme dans un corps si parfait” (549-50), is not mentioned in d’Aulnoy’s moral even though it is the King’s declaration of his fidelity to Toute Belle that causes him to drop the magical sword he was using to defend them both from the Nain Jaune. In essence, Toute Belle dies because she refuses to marry a spouse she does not love, an outcome that runs counter to précieux rejection of forced marriages. But in death d’Aulnoy allows her lovers the union they were denied in life: transforming their lifeless bodies into two beautiful palm trees whose embracing branches immortalise their tender, faithful love.9

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9 The metamorphosis of people into trees is a motif that appears in many mythological narratives, the transformation of Philemon and Baucis in Ovid’s
Like d’Aulnoy’s unhappy couples in “L’Île de la Félicité” and “Le Mouton”, their perfect love cannot survive in the imperfect human world.

Murat’s tales of thwarted and unrequited love illustrate disappearances of a different nature. In “Anguillette”, the tragic death of the unhappy lovers occurs after they have both married someone else. It is the continuation of their passion despite these marriages that leads to their untimely demise. In “L’Aigle au beau bec”, and “Peine Perdue”, marriage also plays a pivotal role in denying the heroic couple the chance to achieve union with their beloved. The unfortunate metamorphosed king in “L’Aigle au beau bec” is tricked into marrying an imposter disguised as his beloved. Peine Perdue’s unhappy destiny is sealed when the object of her affection marries his fiancée. Rather than questioning whether perfect love can endure in the human world, Murat’s bittersweet tales imply that the experience of love is fated to involve disappointment.

In “Anguillette”, a love triangle between the heroine, Princess Hébé, her sister, Princess Ilérie, and Prince Atimir results in a tragic duel in which Atimir is killed, and Hébé throws herself on his sword. This tale, which Murat begins with the maxim: “Quelque grandeur où le destin élève ceux qu’il favorise, il n’est point de félicité exempte de véritables chagrins” (85), provides a cautionary example of the unhappiness caused by love. Anguillette, the fairy who assists Hébé throughout the tale, advises Hébé against her desire for love, warning her that it is a dangerous passion that cannot be controlled even by fairy magic. Despite Anguillette’s attempts to protect Hébé from her fatal passion for the inconstant Atimir, Hébé’s unhappy fate is sealed when she ignores Anguillette’s warning never to see Atimir again. The tragic ending following their reunion illustrates the inability of conventional seventeenth-century morality to control passionate love: marriage to other loving spouses does not mean that Hébé and Atimir can resist their desire for one another. Incapable of escaping the fatal lure of their passion, Hébé and Atimir are released from their suffering only in death, when they, like d’Aulnoy’s Toute Belle and the King of Mines d’Or, are transformed into a pair of beautiful trees as a monument to unhappy lovers.

The bittersweet ending in “Anguillette” is echoed in Murat’s “Peine Perdue”, a tale of unrequited love that ends with the heroine finding refuge in the “pays des Injustices de l’Amour” (403). Unable to make the object of her affection fall in love with her, Peine Perdue’s unhappy fate fulfils her fairy mother’s premonition that she would suffer misfortune due to love.

Metamorphoses being the most well-known example. D’Aulnoy is not the only fairy tale author to use this trope; it appears also in Murat’s “Anguillette”, and in Bernard’s “Le Prince Rosier”.

Peine Perdue cannot escape her love, but her suffering is eased by the company of other “personnes tendres, malheureuses et fidèles” (403). Murat does not, however, ameliorate the pain of unrequited love for the unfortunate hero in “L’Aigle au beau bec”. Punished by his initial aversion to marriage by falling hopelessly in love with a princess who is in love with another man, the king ends up married to the princess whose love he spurned at the beginning of the tale. The tale ends with the revelation that he is not married to his beloved but to a princess disguised to look like her. This rather abrupt ending does not provide the king’s reaction to this revelation, and he, like Peine Perdue, is left to make the best of an unfortunate situation when it becomes clear that he will never be united with his beloved. In both tales, marriage causes all hope of a happy ending to disappear.

Marriage and the disappearance of love

The endings to Bernard’s “Le Prince Rosier” and Murat’s “Le Palais de la Vengeance” are more overtly pessimistic than the tragic endings caused by denial of union between the heroic couple. In this second category of unhappy endings, it is the union between the heroic couple that causes suffering, as their love disappears when they are united together forever. In Bernard’s tale, the marriage between the heroic couple is ruined by jealousy, and the hero of the tale asks the fairies to turn him back into a rosebush as he can no longer bear being married. In Murat’s tale, the heroic couple faithfully endures several tests of separation, but when they are eternally imprisoned in an enchanted palace with only each other for company, the fire of their passion is extinguished. Unlike d’Aulnoy’s tales, which create a utopian paradise in which the promise of love is denied, Bernard and Murat begin their tales with a prediction of misfortune that is fulfilled by the end of the tale.

In Bernard’s “Le Prince Rosier”, a fairy predicts that the heroine, Princess Florinde, will suffer unhappiness if she loves a lover she cannot see:

Florinde est née avec beaucoup d'appas,
Mais son malheur doit être extrême,
S’il faut qu’un jour elle aime
L’amant qu’elle ne verra pas. (279)

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10 Peine Perdue’s refuge does not have the same curative properties as l’Île Paisible in “Anguillette”, which has the power to cure “les passions malheureuses” (101-2).
When Florinde falls in love with a talking rosebush that turns out to be a metamorphosed prince, Prince Rosier, the sincerity of her affection returns the prince to his true form. But when Florinde attempts to evade her destiny by testing the fidelity of her beloved before agreeing to marry him, she inadvertently seals her unhappy fate. After sending Prince Rosier to l’Île de la Jeunesse, Florinde suffers the pain of their separation for fifteen days before recalling her beloved and marrying him without asking whether he remained faithful to her. Bernard suggests that it is this marriage that ends the pleasures in the heroic couple’s life, just as it often ends all the pleasure in life: “le mariage, selon la coutume, finit tous les agréments de leur vie” (285). Bernard identifies the love shared by the couple as the reason their marriage is destined to fail: “les gens accoutumés à aimer ne sont pas si raisonnables que les autres et ne font guère l’exemple des bons ménages” (285). It is their passion that makes Florinde and her husband unable to act reasonably towards each other, and as a consequence, they make each other miserable.

Unlike the death in d’Aulnoy’s tales and Murat’s “Anguillette”, the tragedy in this ending is perfectly ordinary. When the prince admits to a flirtation with the queen of youth, Florinde’s jealousy transforms the couple’s love into hate. Their marriage fails and the prince asks the fairies to transform him back into a rosebush. This pessimistic representation of marriage as an inevitable cause of unhappiness fulfils Bernard’s authorial intention of creating stories that resist happy endings featuring virtuous lovers. Bernard explains her penchant for representing unhappy lovers in the preface to Le Comte d’Amboise (1689): “J’ai déclaré que mon dessein était de ne faire voir que des amants malheureux, pour combattre, autant qu’il m’est possible, le penchant qu’on a pour l’amour” (Roche-Mazon 413). For Bernard, the presentation of unhappy lovers was a deliberate authorial choice designed to question literary celebration of love as the ultimate happy ending.

Bernard’s decision to use her fairy tales to represent the “malheurs de l’amour” is reflected in “Riquet à la houppe”. In this tale, a beautiful but stupid heroine, Mama, is offered the gift of intelligence by a monstrously ugly gnome in exchange for a promise to marry him (287). This marriage, to which Mama agrees despite her complete indifference to her husband, causes misery for both spouses. Riquet is wounded by his wife’s obvious disgust for him, and Mama is trapped in a loveless marriage with full awareness of her husband’s defects. Mama’s attempts to ameliorate her misery by smuggling her lover into her husband’s subterranean kingdom are discovered by her husband, who punishes her infidelity by transforming Mama’s lover into his mirror image so she cannot tell them apart. This tale
does not warn against marrying without love; it warns against marriage as an inevitable source of unhappiness. The ending to the tale suggests that for Bernard, it does not matter that Mama married her husband rather than her lover; the result is the same: “les amants à la longue deviennent des maris” (292). It is not love that disappears, but the hope that it might be possible to experience love within marriage.

In Murat’s “Le Palais de la Vengeance”, the fate of the heroic couple, Princess Imis and Prince Philax, fulfills a fairy prophecy that Imis will become unhappy because of too much happiness. This cryptic destiny is fulfilled at the end of the tale when Imis and Philax, are enclosed in an enchanted glass palace from which they cannot escape. Although Imis’ and Philax’s tender love survives several tests of their fidelity, it is destroyed when they achieve the union they desire. As the moral to the tale explains, once they achieve a state akin to marriage, they eventually become bored with their good fortune and each other:

Avant ce temps fatal, les amants trop heureux
Brûlaient toujours des mêmes feux,
Rien ne troublait le cours de leur bonheur extrême ;
Pagan leur fit trouver le secret malheureux, 
De s’ennuyer du bonheur même. (158)

In each of the unhappy endings written by d’Aulnoy, Bernard and Murat, love initially provides hope of what is now understood as the conventional marriage closure, but then tragedy overtakes the narrative. The tragedy in question is the disappearance of the love shared by the heroic couple, and it is this loss which denies the possibility of a happy ending. If I return to the socio-political questions posed at the beginning of this paper, the absence of a marriage closure in these unhappy endings limits the emancipatory potential of love as an emotion capable of altering the balance of power between men and women in the seventeenth century. In d’Aulnoy’s “L’Île de la Félicité”, “Le Mouton”, and “Le Nain Jaune”, the perfect love shared by the heroic couple is displaced by the intrusion of the outside world, which separates the lovers from each other. All hope of a happy ending disappears when this separation results in the death of the hero. In Murat’s “Anguillette”, “Peine Perdue”, and “L’Aigle au beau bec”, love leads to suffering, disappointment and death rather than union in marriage. Hope of a happy ending is lost when the beloved marries another. When loving union between the heroic couple is achieved in Bernard’s “Le Prince Rosier” and Murat’s “Le Palais de la Vengeance”, their happiness is fleeting as their love disappears once they are married. The social implications of these pessimistic endings firmly reject any suggestion that love is the solution to
the patriarchal power imbalance in marriage criticised by seventeenth-century salon discourse. Marriage, with or without love, is an institution that cannot produce a truly happy ending for women.

Works Cited


