THE SINGING BONE: COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY & THE CREATION OF A QUEER IMAGINARY

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines how oral folklore and supernatural elements open to view queer ways of imagining in works by French writer Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1650-1705), Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736-1796), and Swedish novelist Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940). Through their re-writing of supernatural stories from oral tradition, these authors articulate queer imaginaries that envision alternative configurations of identity and desire, in which eroticism expands beyond a binary framework, and in which equality is established between humans and nature. By reimagining oral materials in a literary form, these authors demonstrate the complexity of the interrelation between oral and literary texts and engage creativity as a collective rather than individual practice.

Each author's marginalized position contributed to their use of popular genres (such as fairy tales, ballads, and folktales) to convey their critiques of the dominant culture in which they lived. All used the supernatural to reimagine the worlds they'd been excluded from. D'Aulnoy's literary fairy tales emerged out of the oral context of the Parisian salons, and used the magical setting of the *merveilleux* to articulate political critiques of women's position in seventeenth-century France. Through the transformations of her characters, D'Aulnoy's tales illustrate new capacities for erotic attachment, queering heteronormative sexuality by expanding sensuality and desire

beyond the human. In his *Ossian* poems, eighteenth-century Gaelic poet James Macpherson recreated the oral tradition of the Highland bards within a literary context. Through his evocation of Ossian as an intermediary with the dead, Macpherson's poems convey a queer poetic imaginary in which the boundaries that separate humans from nature, and the living from the dead, are fluid. Nineteenth-century Swedish novelist Selma Lagerlöf reimagined storytelling traditions from her native Värmland in her novels to depict a liminal world, in which the boundaries between men and women, humans and nature, and the material and spiritual world, are constantly shifting. Through this examination of queer texts with roots in oral folklore, my project provides a theoretical model for recognizing this phenomenon in other literary works.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE SINGING BONE

"In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives."

-Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

"Since it was, therefore, primarily through my sexual and emotional life that I was radicalized—that I first became truly aware of the differences between how I was and how I was supposed to be, or expected to be—I found myself, as I grew older, increasingly writing about sexuality and its manifestations in human practice. And I found most of my raw material in the lumber room of the Western European imagination."

-Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line"

He made a harp of her breast-bone,
Whose sounds would melt a heart of stone.

The strings he framed of her yellow hair,
Whose notes made sad the listening ear.

He brought it to her father's hall,
And there was the court assembled all.

He laid this harp upon a stone,
And straight it began to play alone.

-"The Twa Sisters"

In the traditional Scottish ballad, "The Twa Sisters," a jealous girl drowns her sister when they vie for the attentions of the same suitor. Upon discovering her drowned body, a passing musician transforms the girl's remains into a harp, using her finger bones to fashion the pegs, her hair for strings, and her nose to make the bridge. When the musician takes the instrument to court, the instrument begins to play itself, the dead's girl's voice emerging from her bones to tell how the jealous sister pushed the drowned girl her to her death. Some versions end with the accusation, others with a more grisly come-uppance for the murderer (in one variant the instrument causes the jealous sister's heart to burst). In most Norwegian and some Swedish variants, the instrument is broken

at the end of the song and the drowned sister is restored to life. However, what's consistent in all the versions of the ballad is the transformation of the body of the drowned girl into a musical instrument, followed by its unaccompanied performance to sing the truth about her death.

The first English printing of the ballad dates back to 1656, but it is likely much older. Variants of this so-called 'murder ballad' exist throughout Northern Europe, with at least twenty-one English variants, and versions recorded in Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, and Norwegian. There are 125 different variants in Swedish alone. The ballad shows up in prose as well, most famously in the Brothers Grimm collection as "The Singing Bone" (KHM 28), with brothers instead of sisters, and a mouth organ being fashioned from the bone instead of a harp, but prose versions also exist in Poland, Hungary, and Slovenia. The ballad's popularity persists today—the list of versions recorded within the last fifty years is too numerous to count. Ask any folk musician today and they will be able to name at least one variant. Artists from Tom Waits to Loreena McKennitt to Bob Dylan's mentor, Paul Clayton, have recorded versions. Just last year the Appalachian folk duo, House and Land included a version on their 2019 album, Across the Field. So why is this ballad so popular? What is so powerful about this tale of a murdered girl and her singing bones? And what might ballads like this one, that have been reworked countless times over the centuries and continue to endure in the popular imagination, have to teach us about the way we conceptualize the world?

Most often read as a cautionary tale against greed and female jealousy, "The Twa Sisters," gives voice to some of the cruelest, and most universal, aspects of human existence—unrequited love, jealousy, murder, and revenge. However, it is the ballad's

core image—of a body transformed into a magical harp and its singing bones—that I believe contributes to the ballad's persistence in story and song. What does this image offer us? How might it help us re-think the way we relate to our bodies? To the natural world? And what might it have to teach us about collective materials with their origins in oral culture, like ballads and fairy tales?

Bound up in the image of the singing bone is the foundational premise of this dissertation, which is that transformation is a powerful conceptual tool for understanding the subversive capacity of re-written texts, especially texts from oral tradition that depict instances of magical transformation. I argue that these kinds of texts—folkloric texts with supernatural elements that are re-written from oral tradition—have a unique ability to critique dominant cultural ideas and articulate non-hegemonic and anti-patriarchal ideas in their place. In this dissertation, I examine the work of three authors whose work exemplifies this phenomenon: Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy in France (1650-1705), James Macpherson in Scotland (1736-1796), and Selma Lagerlöf in Sweden (1858-1940). Through their use of supernatural folklore all three authors queer patriarchal ideology by destabilizing the logic of several of the most restrictive binary constructions of heterosexist patriarchy, offering instead a queer ontology of liminality, multiplicity, and transformation. In different ways, the work of all three authors deconstructs the ideological split between the mind and the body, between humans and the natural world, between men and women, between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and between the oral and the literary. Through their re-writing of supernatural stories that come from oral tradition, these authors not only subvert the hierarchical logic that has historically governed these binary categories, they articulate queer imaginaries where fluid

movement between them makes radical new configurations of identity and desire possible, in which our bodies are a source of knowledge and pleasure, and in which equality is established between humans and the natural world.

Methodologically, my project uses close reading and literary analysis together with feminist and queer theory to illustrate the queer ontology I locate within these texts. The materials in this dissertation cover a range of time periods, languages, and genres, in order to demonstrate that this confluence of factors (queerness, the supernatural, and oral folklore) is not confined to any one historical period, nor is it limited to a particular genre. My intent is to expand the category of queerness and the supernatural beyond the confines of a single language tradition, a single time period, and beyond a single academic discipline. As a result, this project lies at the intersection of literary studies, gender and sexuality studies, and folklore studies. In assembling this queer archive of texts that have their roots in oral folklore, and illuminating the possibility for subversion within these kinds of stories, my project also provides a framework to help others recognize this phenomenon in a wider body of literature beyond the texts examined in this dissertation.

I use the word queer in this project in two primary ways: both as an adjective to refer to that which expands beyond binary logic and can be characterized by liminality, multiplicity, open possibility, and resistance to stability, particularly in relation to constructions of identity and situations of desire and/or erotic attachment; but also, as a verb to refer to the act of critiquing, challenging, subverting, transgressing, and expanding beyond dominant patriarchal and hetero-normative ideas. A queer reading of a text is a disruption, a disturbance, a troubling of norms. As Eve Sedgwick writes, it is an

attempt to "make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled."[1] It involves a reading practice founded on demands and intuitions that run "against the grain, often, of the most accessible voices even in the texts themselves."[2] In this way, queerness can also be understood as a certain critical attitude or stance that is adopted vis-à-vis a text. Creative engagement with another text (in the form of a re-telling) can be an act of queer reading, a performative act that transforms, or queers elements from the original text. I therefore use the word queer to refer both to characters, events, and ideas within the text, as well as to refer to the relationship between one variant of a text and another; so queerness functions in my readings both on the level of content (intratextually), as well as in regards to structure and form (intertextually).

Creating Queer Imaginaries: The Supernatural as Subversive

My objects of study in this dissertation are supernatural narratives that have their roots in oral tradition because I believe that the subversive capacity feminist scholars have attributed to the fairy tale can exist in *any* text with supernatural elements that has been re-imagined from oral tradition—whether it is a fairy tale, a ballad, a novel, or another kind of text that has a relationship with traditional collective sources. The subversive potential that I identify in these kinds of texts is a result of two primary features: the fact that the text is re-written from oral tradition, and the presence of the supernatural. Folkloric texts like ballads and fairytales, that have their roots in oral

[1] Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," 5.
[2] Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," 5.

tradition but are constantly re-told, have a rich capacity for critical intervention, thanks to their ongoing and vibrant relationship with their antecedents. The tension between convention and variation in each new iteration of a folkloric text opens up a space for critical dialogue with the versions that have come before. The folk tale shares similar qualities with the genre of parody, which Linda Hutcheon has described as having a "doubled structure" that "is very much an inscription of the past in the present, and it is for this reason that it can be said to embody and bring to life actual historical tensions."[3]

That is not to say that *all* fairy tales and ballads are necessarily subversive or transgressive because of this tension; on the contrary, folkloric texts have just as much capacity for reinforcing conventional or even repressive ideologies and ideas as transgressive ones. As an example of the kind of conservative thinking fairy tales can reinforce, we need only turn to any number of the early, animated films by Walt Disney. These films take the patriarchal gender roles depicted in fairy tales by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm and exaggerate them to portray passive princesses with no agency or autonomy who are valued almost exclusively for their beauty and obedience, and female villains who communicate that powerful women are self-serving and evil.[4] However, the same texts upon which these films are based have also been studied by queer and feminist fairy tale scholars to examine other meanings beyond the culturally normative.[5] Since fairy tales and other collective materials are re-told and re-written so

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[3] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, xii.

[4] There has been a great deal of feminist fairytale scholarship devoted to analyzing the gender roles encoded in fairy tales. For a good overview of this history see: Donald Haase's "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches.* (2004); for a specific analysis of the patriarchal gender roles enforced by Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, see Maria Tatar's *Off With Their Heads! Fairytales and the Culture of Childhood*. (1992), 229- 238.

[5] See Pauline Greenhill and Kay Turner, eds., *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012).

many times they become, what Maria Tatar as referred to as a "dense palimpsest of narratives, with so many layers that it becomes almost impossible to sort out the many different cultural stakes in the narrative;"[6] and as Jessica Tiffin notes, "Fairy tale symbols function resonantly rather than illustratively to suggest multiple meanings rather than to illustrate one aspect of reality."[7]

The other feature shared by the texts I examine, and which I argue is critically linked to their subversive potential, is the presence of the supernatural. Much of my thinking in this regard has been informed by the work of queer and feminist fairy tale scholars who have identified the fairy tale's potential for subversion as a result of the magic within the tales. Fairy tale scholar Cristina Bacchilega has pointed out that it is the fairy tale's magic that produces the genre's paradoxical ability to convey both ideologically narrow and repressive ideas as well as the possibility for the transformation of those ideas: "As folk and fairy tale, the tale of magic produces wonder precisely through its seductively concealed exploitation of the conflict between its *normative* function, which capitalizes on the comforts of consensus, and its *subversive* wonder, which magnifies the powers of transformation."[8] Bacchilega's identification of the double capacity of the fairy tale to convey both normative and subversive ideas resonates with the way Lewis Seifert has characterized fairy tales as "nostalgic utopias" because they use an idealized version of the past to envision a hopeful future. This combination of nostalgia with a utopian impulse is a central ambiguity of the French literary fairy tales of the seventeenth century according to Seifert:

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[6] Tatar, *Beauty and the Beast*, xxvii.
[7] Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry*, 15.
[8] Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, 7.

> Compared to their oral prototypes, literary fairy tales are not only more prone to use the marvelous, they also inscribe it within a larger project of nostalgic recuperation and recreation of (what is perceived to be) a lost social cohesion and interaction.[9]

Like Bacchilega, Seifert identifies the tension in the fairy tale between its radical potential and its normative tendencies as a result of the way magic functions in the stories (in the context of seventeenth-century French fairy tales is known as the marvelous—*le merveilleux*). It is the magic of the fairy tale that "produces both a monologic return to a mythic past and a dialogic critique of the past and the present with a view toward the future."[10]

Seifert's claim that the fairy tale's magic produces a desire to return to a mythic past is also connected with the genre's historical association with nostalgic movements like Romanticism and the creation of national literary canons, and why Rosemary Jackson has characterized fantasy literature as: "a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence or loss."[11] Jackson identifies the same normalizing, conservative potential in fantasy literature that exists in fairy tales, which is fueled by nostalgia and a desire for: "a 'better', more complete, unified reality," found in the writing of authors like T. H. White, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien, who all lived through two world wars, and whose writing looks back to "a lost moral and social hierarchy, which their fantasies attempt to recapture and revivify."[12] In its connection with the unconscious, the realm of fantasy is related to our deepest unresolved desires. As Jackson writes, fantastic literature "tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire, to make

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[9] Seifert, *Fairy Tales,* 22.
[10] Seifert, *Fairy Tales,* 23.
[11] Jackson, *Fantasy*, 3.
[12] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 2.

visible the invisible and to discover absence."[13] The reason fantasy literatures are so well suited to making invisible desires visible and addressing feelings of absence or loss is because they imagine worlds where anything is possible.

In worlds governed by magic, anything can happen. Mutability is therefore a defining feature of the fairy tale. Marina Warner has described how the fairy tale's capacity to inspire wonder is what makes it so receptive to imagining alternative realities:

> The verb 'to wonder' communicates the receptive state of marveling as well as the active desire to know, to inquire, and as such it defines very well at least two characteristics of the traditional fairy tale: pleasure in the fantastic, curiosity about the real. The dimension of wonder creates a huge theatre of possibility in the stories: anything can happen. This very boundlessness serves the moral purpose of the tales, which is precisely to teach where boundaries lie. The dreaming gives pleasure in its own right, but it also represents a practical dimension to the imagination, an aspect of the faculty of thought, and can unlock social and public possibilities.[14]

According to Marina Warner, the boundlessness of the tales' imaginative structure is what enables them to envision more expansive articulations of our social reality. If, as Warner points out, the fairy tale's capacity to combine "pleasure in the fantastic" with "curiosity about the real" is why the fairy tale has the ability to "unlock social and public possibilities,"[15] then this combination of factors is also what makes the fairy tale (and other re-told folkloric texts) capable of transforming that social reality. It is thanks to this capacity that magical folkloric texts have the power to critique and subvert the very boundaries they articulate.

Jack Zipes has also written about this subversive potential of the fairy tale, arguing that we must turn our attention to the many transgressive elements contained

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[13] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 4.
[14] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde,* xx.
[15] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde,* xx.

within the tales in order to recuperate the fairy tale from its normalizing tendencies. According to Zipes, the value of fairy tales lies in how we "actively produce and receive them in forms of social interaction which leads towards the creation of greater individual autonomy. Only by grasping and changing the forms of social interaction and work shall we be able to make full use of the utopian and fantastic projections of folk and fairy tales."[16] Zipes' remarks point to the transgressive potential in re-telling folkloric texts; in order to make use of their utopian potential, we need to actively engage with the tales by re-writing them. His emphasis on the need for active engagement with the fairy tale in order to transform its force in our cultural heritage highlights the performative potential in fairy tales, and other magic folkloric texts, in the way they invite participation from their readers.

Understanding fairy tales and fantasy literature as "a literature of desire"[17] with the potential to "unlock social and public possibilities" [18] is also why these kinds of stories lend themselves to explorations of identity and sexuality, and why they provide such a rich field of scholarship for queer studies. In the introduction to their 2012 study on queer readings of the Grimms' fairy tales, *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*, Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill articulate why queerness and queer studies works so well in the realm of the fairy tale. While they acknowledge the patriarchal and heteronormative force of many of the tales "like the happy ending of wedded heterosexual bliss—or patriarchal moral lessons—like the punishment of curious girls," their focus is on "the tales' internal struggles, suggestive of multiple and more complex

[16] Zipes qtd in Turner and Greenhill, *Transgressive Tales,* 4.
[17] Jackson, *Fantasy,* 3.
[18] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde,* xx.

desires and their perversely performative nature."[19] For Turner and Greenhill, it isn't only the ending of the tale that carries its significance. As they point out, even if the surface of the fairy tale "may be moralistic, socially restrictive, and gender/sexuality normative" it is "the fairy tale's deep structure, *represented by the realm of enchantment* [italics mine]" that is "antimoralistic, agency oriented, and gender/sexuality expressive in terms that challenge normativity."[20] The presence of magic within the fairy tale is therefore what makes this kind of subversive thinking possible.

Stories that feature magic and enchantment invite queer readings because the governing logic of their supernatural worlds is characterized by limitlessness and transformation. Both of these qualities: limitlessness (in the sense of expansion and the uninhibited transgression of borders and boundaries), and transformation (in the sense of shape-shifting and metamorphosis) are central to my definition of the word queer because both of these concepts imply resistance to stability and singularity. As Katarina Bonnevier writes in *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture,* "Queer implies inter-changeability and excess; the possibility to move, make several interpretations, slide over, or reposition limits."[21] This shifting or liminal quality is present in the work of all three authors thanks to the presence of the supernatural.

This liminal quality is queer because it undermines or destabilizes binary thinking—more specifically, those binaries which are foundational to upholding patriarchy and heteronormativity. As Bonnevier points out: "Queer theory works to

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[19] Turner and Greenhill, *Transgressive Tales,* 3.
[20] Turner and Greenhill, *Transgressive Tales,* 6.
[21] Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains,* 22.

destabilize divisive regimes based on binary thinking and perception, the thinking that constructs male and female as hierarchical oppositions, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual."[22] So by queer, I am not only referring to that which does not fit into the masculine/feminine or homo/hetero binary, and the hierarchies that organize these oppositions, I am also referring to those other binaries which have been instrumental for the continuation of heteronormative patriarchal society, such as: mind/body, human/animal, culture/nature, rational/emotional, spiritual/material, and even, literary/oral. I read the supernatural as queer in the context of these writers because it pushes our understanding of all of these categories beyond their normative definitions; it disrupts binary categories not only by enabling movement between them, but also by expanding beyond those categories altogether, articulating an understanding of the world that recognizes its shifting and multitudinous nature, and helping make legible identities and sexualities that within a binary logic are eclipsed, overlooked, and denied.

The presence of the supernatural within these folkloric rewritings enables queer ways of seeing and thinking to become visible. Each author engages with the supernatural in a different way; however what their work has in common is that they all depict worlds governed by the logic of transformation and liminality, in which the material world can shift and change shape, and in which physical boundaries of all kinds are easily transgressed. D'Aulnoy's fairy tales illustrate new capacities for erotic attachment when humans transform into a range of different animals and then experience desire across the animal human species divide, queering heteronormative sexuality by expanding the possibilities for sensuality and erotic attachment outside of a human context. In

[22] Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains,* 57.

Macpherson's poems, the ghosts of fallen warriors walk amongst the living; they reside in clouds and ride on meteors and bursts of wind, effectively dissolving the boundary between humans and the natural world, as well as between the living and the dead. In Lagerlöf's novels, the Swedish landscape is imbued with spiritual life—the river and the forest are animate and full of evil intention, and trolls, witches, and ghosts interact with human characters, disrupting our belief in a firm boundary between the material and the spiritual world.

This transformative capacity of the material world makes literal abstract concepts imagined by queer writers and theorists, like the idea that identity and sexuality are fluid and exist outside of a binary context. As Rosemary Hennessy writes, "Claiming a queer identity is an effort to speak from and to the differences that have been suppressed both by heteronorms and by the homo-hetero binary; the transsexual, bisexual, and any other ways of 'experiencing' and expressing sensuality and affect that do not conform to the prevailing organization of sexuality."[23] In a supernatural context, magic enables the "differences that have been suppressed" by normative binary thinking, along with alternative ways of "experiencing and expressing sensuality and affect" to take on radical new shapes and dimensions in concrete and visible ways. As Tzevetan Todorv writes in his foundational study on fantastic literature: "The supernatural begins the moment we shift from words to the things these words are supposed to designate. The metamorphoses too, therefore, constitute a transgression of the separation between matter and mind as it

[23] Hennessy, "The Material of Sex," 135.

is generally conceived."[24] In its shift from "words to things," the supernatural concretizes what would otherwise be abstract thoughts, desires, and ideas.

The supernatural, in this case, refers to those events in each author's work that cannot be explained by science or the laws of nature. I use the word supernatural rather than 'fantastical,' or 'marvelous' because each of those words carries with it its own specific history and has too narrow of a definition to fit the phenomenon that I identify in the work of all three authors.[25] In addition, supernatural is the word used by folklorists to describe magical or otherworldly realms, and as I am dealing with folkloric texts, it is the most well suited to cover the broad range of materials I examine. I also use this term because of its etymological connections with 'nature' and the 'natural', which are key components of the magic I explore in the work of all three authors.

In their introduction to *Storied and Supernatural Places: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas,* folklorists Ülo Valk and Daniel Sävborg explain that the term supernatural can be problematic because of the associations it bears with some of the foundational dichotomies of Western culture, namely: matter and spirit, body and mind, and humans and nature. As they rightly point out: "many societies make no distinction between the two realms of Western ontology", thus, they find: "the implied dichotomy it [the supernatural] bears with the 'natural' world, something which in non-Western cultures may be associated with colonial domination" invokes "a hierarchical world where the divine consciousness transcends the earthbound biological reality that is

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[24] Todorov, *The Fantastic,* 113.

[25] As Todorov notes in his study on fantastic literature, "The supernatural does not characterize works closely enough, its extension is much too great" (34). For the purpose of my project, the opposite is true. I need the broader scope that the term 'supernatural' entails.

governed by the laws of nature."[26] The problematic dichotomies that the word 'supernatural' evokes are precisely why it's useful for my purposes, as it is through the supernatural that these various dichotomies and hierarchies are subverted and re-imagined in the work of the authors I examine, who are all Western authors (by Valk and Sävborg's definition).

One of the anti-patriarchal systems of belief that the supernatural opens to view in the work of all three authors is animism, or the notion of animate nature. In contrast to epistemologies in which "personhood as a category can only be applied to self-conscious individual humans," there are many societies and cultures around the world who "are not affected by the theory of the great divide between nature and culture."[27] In these systems of belief, "animals, birds, fish, spirits, deities, rocks and trees can be recognized as (other-than-human) persons—as far as they relate to humans (and to each other) in a particular way."[28] Environmental anthropologist Philippe Descola, who has written extensively on cultures that do not imagine a dualistic model for nature and culture, describes animism as one of the cognitive modes humans use to relate to nature. Valk and Sävborg summarize his claims as follows:

> … in animist ontologies, plants, animals and other elements of the physical environment are endowed with a subjectivity of their own; and […] different kinds of person-to-person relationship are maintained with these entities. In animist thought, both humans and non-humans possess the same psychological dispositions (interiority) with the latter also being bestowed with social characteristics.[29]

[26] Valk and Sävborg, *Storied and Supernatural Places,* 16.
[27] Valk and Sävborg, *Storied and Supernatural Places,* 15.
[28] Valk and Sävborg, *Storied and Supernatural Places,* 15.
[29] Valk and Sävborg, *Storied and Supernatural Places,* 16.

In other words, personhood is granted to beings/entities other than humans, who are understood as being capable of the same kind of subjectivity and interiority that is solely granted to humans in the prevailing ontology of naturalism (which envisions nature and culture as fundamentally separate). In the work of the authors I examine, the supernatural makes this expansive notion of personhood possible by recognizing that other-than-human persons are capable of agency.

So while the term 'supernatural' may in some way allude to the dichotomies that have shaped European colonial culture, it simultaneously references the possibility for overcoming this divisive thinking. Anthropologist Susan Sered has argued that the term can also be understood to mean " 'enhanced natural' or ultra-natural, rather than 'not natural.'"[30] This is precisely how I use the term in my study to refer to what is "beyond the natural or the ordinary," and to refer to stories in which magic connects us to "spheres that exist beyond what we might typically see hear, taste, touch or smell."[31] In this way, the supernatural also has the potential to expand our capacities for experiencing the world through our senses. By giving us access to a more expansive sensual capacity, the supernatural can help create a greater awareness of our own embodiment and make us aware of the ways in which the spiritual is entwined with the material, another false dichotomy that has been foundational to patriarchal thought.

Thanks to its transformative and liminal capacity, and its connection to the natural world, the supernatural can help restore value to many of the categories that occidental culture has deemed savage, monstrous, low, and despicable—such as women, animals,

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[30] Valk and Sävborg, *Storied and Supernatural Places,* 17.
[31] Valk and Sävborg, *Storied and Supernatural Places,* 17.

the natural world in general, the body, and anyone who is a cultural outsider in white supremacist patriarchal society. The supernatural stories I examine in this dissertation depict women and men who are caught halfway between these various binary states of being—between nature and civilization, between the human and the animal, even between the living and the dead. The transgressive possibility in supernatural songs and stories is a result of the fact that they embrace these figures that exist somewhere between binary categories. In traditional ballads like "The Twa Sisters," in d'Aulnoy's animal transformation fairy tales, in Macpherson's *Ossian* poems, and Lagerlöf's novels, we see humans that are part animal, spirits that become corporeal and humans that become spirits; we see that living humans can speak with the dead, that trees and rivers contain souls like humans, and that bones and hair can have the power of speech. These texts invert the way we traditionally think of binary categories and the values we associate with them.

Intertextual Transformations: Rewriting as an Act of Queer Performance

Similar to my use of the word queer, I use the word transformation in this project in two different ways: first, in an intratextual sense, as in the material transformations (most often magical) that occur within the texts themselves, when physical matter undergoes marked changes in form, nature or appearance; so for example, the transformation of the girl's body into a harp in "The Twa Sisters," or the transformation of a human princess into a cat in d'Aulnoy's fairy tale "La Chatte Blanche." Second, I use transformation in an intertextual sense, to refer to the transformation of one version of a text into another, for example, to describe the re-telling or re-writing of folkloric

texts. This intertextual aspect of transformation is relevant in my discussion of how re-written folkloric texts are queer in a performative sense in the way they challenge the binary and hierarchical relationship between an 'original' text and a derivative version, ultimately revealing that the concept of the original is not a useful construct for conceptualizing creativity.[32] Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity is helpful for understanding how re-told texts can exist in queer relation to their predecessors.

Butler's notion of gender as a performance is that each performance is a copy of an original that does not exist. The performance exposes the fiction that there is a stable original gender in a similar way to how re-told or translated texts expose the fiction of a stable original text. Architectural theorist Katarina Bonnevier uses Butler's work on gender performance in her queer analysis of architectural spaces. Summarizing Butler's work, Bonnevier writes: "The effect of gender presentations is that they feel natural. They produce an illusion of a psychic essence; an inner sex or gender core."[33] This idea of an inner essence or pre-existing true gender can also be related to the way we think about texts, especially when texts are re-written, adapted, or translated. In folklore studies, as in the field of translation studies, there is a long and contested history about the sanctity of the original, or authentic text. Re-writings of folkloric materials (whether transcribed from oral tradition, or re-written entirely from a prior textual source), as well as translations from one language to another, are judged as literary objects on the basis of how close, or how faithful, they are to the original.

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[32] It's important to point out here that the concept of the original, especially as it applies to the idea of genius, is a Romantic construction, and therefore, relates to Romantic and post-Romantic literature. Before that, the measure of success was determined by the success to which poets and authors re-told classical texts, for example, Fenelon's *Aventures de Telemaque* (1699).

[33] Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains,* 270.

However, recent work in the field of translation studies, notably Karen Emmerich's 2017 book *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals,* has problematized the concept of a stable original, proposing instead that we think of translation as "interpretive iteration."[34] In fact, Emmerich's work invites us to reconsider our understanding of *any* literary text as "a singular entity whose lexical content is stable or fixed," not just translated texts: "The textual condition is one of variance, not stability. The process of translation both grapples with and extends that variance, defining the content and form of an 'original' in the very act of creating yet another textual manifestation of a literary work in a new language."[35] Emmerich's notion of the instability of all texts equalizes the status of translated and 'original' texts, showing that they are equally valuable. So just as successful gender performance produces the illusion of an original gender, so too do re-written and translated texts produce the illusion of a whole original that can never be fully attained.

Just as in a gender performance, in which all gender is drag but "only, the drag show reveals that gender is drag through parody or ironic enactment," the same could be said for re-written texts: that only *translation* (or imitation and re-writing) reveals that the idea of an original text is a fallacy, showing that all writing is interpretation to varying degrees.[36] There is no true original in translation because even the "original" as we understand it is an attempt to express something that exists beyond language. As Bonnevier explains:

> To cross-dress is to question the heterosexual norm that under false pretence of neutrality makes a 'natural' connection between femininity, female and woman. It

[34] Emmerich, *Literary Translation,* 1.
[35] Emmerich, *Literary Translation,* 1.
[36] Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains,* 270-1.

> gives us trouble to stick to narrow binary thinking. In Judith Butler's words 'The parodic repetition of 'the original', […], reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original.' She writes that the drag show parodies the simplistic division in women and men and points to a much more varied idea of gender. In short, cross-dressing is a critical masquerade which plays with gender and possibly carries a strategy for change. [37]

So not only does the drag show reveal that there is no original gender, it also exposes the falsity of a binary understanding of gender—gender performances illustrate that gender expression is much more complicated than a simplistic division into men and women.

If we apply this thinking to the notion of textual iteration, we will find that the principle is the same. If we think of textual re-writing as a kind of cross-dressing, especially re-writings of folkloric texts, we can see how the *performance* of that prior text (here we could also say copy or imitation) reveals the instability of the original. Folk songs and stories are a testament to the instability of the concept of an original text because, especially with oral versions, it is almost always impossible to locate an original.[38] Because of their very multiplicity then, these kinds of texts help reveal that there is no such thing as an original text, just as drag performances reveal there is no authentic innate gender identity. In their multiplicity and endless variation, re-written folkloric texts undo the binary relationship that imagines one text as primary and another as derivative, and thus undercuts the hierarchy which dictates that the primary or original text is superior to the adaptation. Furthermore, Bonnevier's assessment that cross dressing carries with it the possibility of "a strategy for change," is similar to my own assessment that folkloric texts invite creative intervention; because these texts exist within a tradition of re-writing, and because they function within an ontology of

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[37] Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains,* 271.

[38] As just one example of this phenomenon, see Alan Dundes's study of the existence of the Cinderella tale around the world in his *Cinderella: A Casebook.* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

transformation, their very existence as one iteration in a long line of other versions invites further transformation and creative adaptation.

We can draw yet another parallel here between Butler's concept of gender performativity and translated or re-written texts, which is that the more exaggerated and self-referential the re-written text, the more it draws attention to its status as a copy. D'Aulnoy's re-writings of folktales are exaggerated, excessive and over the top. In this way, she draws attention to the literariness of her mode of production, as well as to her own presence as author within the text. She combines multiple literary and oral sources in her fairy tales and does not pretend to emulate the "authentic" folk voice of the peasant in the way that her more famous fairy tale writing contemporary, Charles Perrault, does. Rather than trying to make her presence as author invisible, she is constantly making her reader aware that they are reading a story that exists within a tradition of other stories of this kind, thus reminding the reader that she is just one member of the broader intertextual network of fairy tales and folk tales into which she is writing. Perrault was aiming to recreate a kind of authenticity; d'Aulnoy was not. In revealing the constructed nature of her fairy tales, d'Aulnoy's writing points to the constructed nature of *all* literary texts in the sense that they are all attempts to articulate something that exists beyond language; in other words, they are all copies to varying degrees of originals that don't exist.

The same is also true, to a different degree in Macpherson's poems. Like Perrault, Macpherson was invested in the concept of authenticity. He insisted that his poems were faithful translations of 'genuine' Gaelic originals when in reality he was altering existing material significantly and combining it with his own ideas, similar to d'Aulnoy's

blending of different sources and references in her fairy tales. However, unlike d'Aulnoy, Macpherson was not interested in drawing attention to himself as author; instead, he attempted to erase his authorial interventions altogether so his poems would be received as pure representations of an authentic Gaelic oral tradition. This got him into trouble when he claimed to have manuscript originals for his poems, which he could never produce. Macpherson's investment in the importance of textual authenticity and its dependence on a manuscript original is akin to the idea that authentic gender exists and is dependent on a binary understanding of biology. Macpherson's adherence to the myth of authenticity and his insistence that his translations were pure reflections of that authentic ideal, rather than creative re-writings that added Macpherson's voice to an existing intertextual network of Gaelic poetry, contributed to his work being dismissed as an act of forgery.

Selma Lagerlöf's engagement with the concept of authenticity is more akin to d'Aulnoy's—she does not disguise the fact that her writing combines both oral and literary sources. Unlike Macpherson or Perrault, she is not claiming that her novels are strict re-writings of an oral tradition; she openly blends the oral with the literary, instituting a re-creation of the oral tradition in her novel in the form of its narrator. The narrator recreates a kind of oral tradition within the literary realm of the novel, but does so in a self-conscious way—Lagerlöf plays with the line between the oral and the literary by having her narrator speak to the reader (evoking an oral tradition) but also refers openly to the fact that she is writing the words on the page for the reader to read at a later time. Thus, she openly engages with the constructed nature of the orality she creates.

While Lagerlöf benefitted from her use of oral folklore in one sense (her debut novel was eventually met with great critical acclaim and she was later celebrated as both a regional and national Swedish writer), it was also used as a way to belittle her talents as a writer, as she was imagined to be a mere vessel through which the older stories from the oral tradition were channeled to the reading public. The response to Lagerlöf's use of folklore and orality in her novels shows how gendered notions of authorship inflected the public's understanding of Lagerlöf's use of folkloric materials. The conceptualization of Lagerlöf as a passive storyteller lacking original genius also illustrates the predominance of the hierarchy that dictates that the literary is superior to the oral, and original creative works are superior to those understood to be derivative.

Collective Creativity and the Myth of the Individual Author

The value that the post-industrial, post-Romantic world has invested in the concept of originality is deeply connected to the other concept that the work of these authors reveals to be a fallacy, which is the myth surrounding the authorship of literary works, what I call the myth of the individual genius. This concept of creativity, in which creative activity is believed to be the result of the isolated work of a single individual, gained traction at the end of the Enlightenment, when the concepts of originality and novelty were valued as traits of outstanding importance. The legal regimes that put these values into practice, such as copyright law and patents, also emerged during the late eighteenth century. One intervention in the debates around authorship is articulated by folklore scholar Valdimar Hafstein in his article, "The Politics of Origins: Collective Creation Revisited":

> The Enlightenment was also the period during which the individual subject came into its own and the author function began to take its current shape, as did concepts of 'the people' and popular tradition. Each of these were subsequently consolidated in nineteenth-century Romantic ideology and practice, to which we owe our reverence for genius, the author cult, and, of course, the study of folklore as an academic pursuit.[39]

Hafstein articulates a categorical distinction that has been made by contemporary legal systems between originality and traditionality, pointing out how this distinction enables the protection and profit only of those creative works categorized as "original." In other words, intellectual property laws assume a particular conception of creativity, which is premised on the importance of originality, and therefore does not protect those works of art conceptualized as traditional. Hafstein's remarks illuminate how, after Romanticism, when creative value began to be predicated upon authenticity and singular genius, industrial societies developed a binary understanding of creativity that separates it into two categories—original vs. derivative, and individual vs. collective, bestowing value only on those works that are seen as original and composed by a single author.

The binary thinking that organizes these oppositions does not make room for the complexity that actually takes places in the act of creation; thus, according to this logic, folklore is understood to be "entirely social, without significant contributions from individuals," while authored works are imagined to be "entirely individual, without significant contributions from society."[40] As a further consequence of this logic, social creative productions must lack originality, and only authored works can be novel, "originating as they do in the individual subject and partaking of its unique

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[39] Hafstein, "The Politics of Origins," 305.
[40] Hafstein, "The Politics of Origins," 308.

personality."[41] Instead of arguing that traditional materials have originality by granting some degree of individual origination, Hafstein proposes that folklorists reject the concept of originality as a category for determining the value of creative work, and recognize originality for what it is: "a Romantic relic and the ideological reflex of a particular economic order."[42] What Hafstein proposes instead is an intertextual understanding of creativity, in which notions of originality and origins are irrelevant, and plurality and community are essential. Referencing the work of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin, Hafstein acknowledges that intertextuality is a concept not unknown in the field of literary studies; he also mentions Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* as an impressive example of intertextual analysis in the field of folklore.

In contrast to the understanding of creativity as the production of original works of art in isolation by individuals, an intertextual understanding of creativity recognizes creativity as a *social act,* and creation is understood to be a *social process*. In place of a focus on originality and individual creation, Hafstein's suggestion that we embrace a "social concept of creativity" re-conceptualizes traditional creativity as "communal origination through individual re-creation;"[43] as opposed to how it has been imagined by American folklorists as " 'always individually created and then adopted by the community.' "[44] Hafstein's proposal conceives of copying as a creative act, and "creation as an act of reproduction," thus undermining the logic that has contrasted the two, and

[41] Hafstein, "The Politics of Origins," 308.
[42] Hafstein, "The Politics of Origins," 309.
[43] Hafstein, "The Politics of Origins," 310.
[44] Hafstein, "The Politics of Origins," 308.

that has "articulated other oppositions to this contrast: social versus individual, folk versus elite, colonial versus Western, female versus male, and so on." [45]

Building from Hafstein's proposition, I argue that texts that have been re-written from a folkloric or traditional background illustrate the failure of this binary configuration of creativity (which imagines original works to be superior to derivative, and individual to be superior to collective) to account for the genuine complexity involved in the creative act. Texts that have been influenced by traditional materials, like the ones I examine in this dissertation, model instead what I call collective creativity, which, like the creativity described by Hafstein, conceptualizes the creative act as fundamentally social and communal, acknowledging the importance of *both* the community and the individual in the creative process. While traditional materials created in communities like the ones described by Hafstein also demonstrate a model of collective creativity (in the way that creative production is clearly the result of both individuals and the larger communities they are a part of), texts that are re-written from oral tradition provide especially illustrative examples of the complexity of creative production because of the visible tension in the text between the voice of the individual author and the oral folkloric sources they're engaging with.

Although it manifests very differently in their work, what d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, Macpherson's poems, and Lagerlöf's novels all share is the presence of a distinct authorial voice that at time seems to represent the individual author, and at times, seems to represent the more collective voice of an oral tradition. In this way, their work all navigates the tension between the oral and the literary, the individual and the collective,

[45] Hafstein, "The Politics of Origins," 310.

and original and derivative work, ultimately revealing how both sides of these binary categories are foundational to their creative processes and the articulation of their queer imaginaries. Therefore, the deconstruction of the binary categories at work *within* their writing is also replicated on a structural level in the way they queer the binary categories concerning originality, literariness, and authorship.

Speaking Back: Voices from the Margins

As an act of queer performance, retelling or rewriting is also important from a queer and feminist perspective because it is a way for those who have been silenced to gain a voice, to write back against the dominant narrative. As Hélène Cixous writes in "The Laugh of the Medusa," her famous plea on behalf of women's creativity: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women into writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement."[46] Although Cixous's remarks are about women, the urgency with which she calls on women to seize the occasion to speak, to make her "shattering entry into history" can be applied to any group that has been systematically marginalized and oppressed, and silenced as a result of that oppression.[47] When those in power have been the only ones with access to language, then the symbolic order of the world they've imagined is made up in their image; therefore even if woman dares to speak out, "her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in

[46] Cixous, "Medusa," 875.
[47] Cixous, "Medusa," 880.

language only that which speaks in the masculine."[48] It's therefore imperative that those marginalized groups that have been silenced speak out so that their use of language, informed by their perspective, gives new meaning to the language spoken by those in power.

All three of the authors I examine in this dissertation existed on the margins of their societies to varying degrees, and subsequently were denied the privileges afforded to those in the ruling class who had the power to speak freely. The marginalized position each author occupied is deeply connected to the desires that they express in their writing through the supernatural; in other words, they use the supernatural to reinvent and reimagine the worlds they have been excluded from. There's also a connection between each author's marginalized position, and their use of "popular" genres like the fairy tale, the ballad, and the folk tale, which were seen as inferior by the dominant culture because of their roots in oral tradition and their reputation as un-original copies. Therefore, it is not incidental that these authors, each of whom were marginalized in a different capacity, re-told supernatural stories that came from oral tradition. Because oral folkloric texts exist on the outskirts of official culture, these narratives are well suited to express marginalized voices. By examining the work of these authors together, my project establishes that the transgressive power in their writing is not thanks to any one genre, nor is it thanks to any one-subject position, but rather it comes by virtue of their status on the margins of official culture. This otherness, or outsider status, gives these authors a unique ability to reimagine dominant structures of power. Each writer's position within

[48] Cixous, "Medusa," 881.

their specific time period and social context is therefore a key factor in how I read the transgressive qualities of their work.

The importance of each author's social and literary context, and how those factors relate to the way each author uses the supernatural, the oral, and the traditional in their work, is also why the chapters of this dissertation are arranged chronologically. The first chapter examines how as a woman in the male-dominated world of seventeenth-century France, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1650-1705), used the fairy tale to voice her subversive critiques of women's position in society. Taking into consideration the roots of the fairy tale genre and its particular manifestations in the context of the salons frequented by aristocratic women at the end of the seventeenth century, this chapter shows how d'Aulnoy was able to express her subversive views within the space of the fairy tale without fear of censure because the fairy tale was dismissed as a frivolous genre not worthy of serious attention.

It further demonstrates the ways in which d'Aulnoy's writing emerged out of a situation of collective creativity and how through her mixture of both oral and literary sources, d'Aulnoy's fairy tales challenge a dualistic understanding of the oral and the literary, as well as an understanding of the author as an isolated individual. Through the magic in her stories, d'Aulnoy was able to reimagine new possibilities for women in regard to love and courtship, bestowing women with autonomy and agency over their own romantic relationships, and depicting a world in which identity and desire are not restricted by binary logic.

In the second chapter we move from seventeenth-century France to eighteenth-century Scotland, in order to consider how the poems of Scottish poet James Macpherson

(1736-1796) use the supernatural to express a poetics of melancholy and loss that echo Macpherson's own feelings about a literary tradition that many Scots feared was at risk of being lost forever. Macpherson, who grew up in the Highlands of Scotland during the last attempts by the Highlanders to overthrow British rule, chose to re-write poems from Scottish Gaelic oral tradition in an attempt to establish the legitimacy of a Scottish literary past. His creative adaptations of existing Gaelic-language source material (some oral, some in manuscript form) met with accusations of forgery and fraud when Macpherson, who referred to his creations as translations, failed to produce manuscript originals.

Like d'Aulnoy's literary fairy tales, Macpherson's prose poems are hybrid creations that engage in complex ways with both oral and literary sources, and challenge our understanding of creative works as the products of individual authors. Instead, Macpherson's poems demonstrate a collaborative model of creative production, in which the individual author engages with an existing poetic tradition that is the result of many voices. In Macpherson's poems, the figure of the bard Ossian represents Macpherson's idealized conception of the lost oral tradition of the Highlands. However, it also enables him to move seamlessly between two very different conceptions of creativity (the individual and the collective), revealing that the liminal ontology of the supernatural world within the poems is also reflected on a structural level in Macpherson's dual evocation of two different models of authorship, as well as his simultaneous engagement with the oral and the literary.

In chapter three, we continue our journey, moving forward another century in time to consider the novels of Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940), whose many

beloved literary works were influenced by the folktales and legends of her native Värmland, the province in western Sweden where Lagerlöf grew up. Lagerlöf, who was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature, as well as the first woman to be elected as a member of the prestigious Swedish Academy in 1914, was eventually recognized for her immense talent and literary success by the Swedish cultural elite. However, her use of fairy tales and folklore, especially in her debut novel, *Gösta Berlings saga,* (but also in many later works) contributed to her reputation as a passive re-teller of existing stories, and this was used as an excuse to dismiss her work by patriarchal critics who could not fathom that her use of folkloric elements was in fact a deliberate artistic choice.

Like d'Aulnoy and Macpherson, Lagerlöf engages with both folklore and oral tradition in her novels and in doing so manages to re-create a situation of orality within the literary dimensions of the novel, thus complicating a simplistic binary understanding of the oral and the literary, as well as individual versus collective creativity. By structuring her novel, *Gösta Berlings saga,* around the voice of a single narrator who frequently speaks to the reader and to various characters, supernatural beings, and objects in the story using the literary device of apostrophe, Lagerlöf invokes an oral storytelling situation that gives value to the reciprocal and dialogic nature of the storytelling process. The presence of the supernatural in many of Lagerlöf's novels, but especially in *Gösta Berlings saga,* depicts the same kind of liminal world that exists in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and Macpherson's poems, in which the boundaries between humans and nature, the body and the soul, and the material and spiritual realms are constantly shifting. This transformative capacity that's made possible through the supernatural enables more

expansive ways of imagining human relationships and constructions of identity to emerge.

The Singing Bone

Feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero describes how patriarchal culture has imagined the voice as separate from speech. In her book, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression,* she seeks to articulate a different way of understanding speech and how it relates to the body, in contrast to the history of logocentrism, which privileges thought over speech, and in so doing ignores the plural and reciprocal nature of speaking and its materiality. As she explains, according to logocentric logic, speech "becomes a divider that produces the drastic alternative between an ancillary role for the voice as vocalization of mental signifieds and the notion of the voice as an extraverbal realm of meaningless emissions that are dangerously bodily, if not seductive or quasi-animal. In other words, logocentrism radically denies to the voice a meaning of its own that is not always already destined to speech."[49] Cavarero proposes instead that we recognize that "the act of speaking is relational: what it communicates first and foremost, beyond the specific content that the words communicate, is the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices."[50] Therefore, she is calling for a recognition of the relationality of speaking, as well as an acknowledgment of the materiality of the body in speaking. What's also critical to Cavarero's reconceptualization of speech is recognizing the specificity and uniqueness of each human voice, and each

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[49] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* 13.
[50] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* 13.

human body engaged in speaking, rather than thinking of 'speech' as a general and abstract concept as it is imagined by logocentric philosophers. In recognizing the materiality of speaking, Cavarero establishes the body as a place of value and establishes the "acoustic resonance of a plurality of unique voices"[51] as a starting point for "a different mode of political existence,"[52] which recognizes speaking as an embodied, relational action.

Taking Cavarero's reconceptualization of speech seriously means reevaluating the story that has been told about the primacy of men over women, minds over bodies, and thinking over speaking. Even if logocentrism has privileged speech over writing (in its association of speech with metaphysical truth), according to Cavarero, it still takes the body (and more specifically, the voice) out of the equation. Even Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism's privileging of speech over writing fails to consider the voice in its material and sonorous reality. As Cavarero writes, "the voice of phenomenological consciousness, here deconstructed by Derrida, is a voice of thought, totally insonorous."[53] In failing to consider the voice as a physical phenomenon uttered by an individual and unique speaker, philosophy becomes "structurally monological, not dialogical or polyphonic. Inclined to be interested in the Said, philosophy ignores the relationality of Saying, and thus the plurality of voices. The ancient metaphor of the voice of the soul [...] alludes moreover to an interior monologue where there is no sound."[54]

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[51] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* xii.
[52] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* viii.
[53] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* 220.
[54] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* 220.

The goal of Cavarero's feminist reconsideration of the voice is therefore to "liberate the speaker from his solipsistic prison in order to open him to the world and the plurality of voices, to the relational horizon of Saying."[55] This relationality that Cavarero stresses in the act of speaking emphasizes the importance of *listening* as well, and for Cavarero the uniqueness of each speaker in his or her specificity invokes: "the other in resonance," thereby inviting a recognition of the other and the establishment of the potential for reciprocity.[56] In emphasizing the materiality of the voice, and the embodied nature of speaking, Cavarero also recognizes the vulnerability that's entailed in having a body. As she writes, "For as much as the metaphysicians, and Derrida with them, pretend to ignore it, this is precisely the life—always fragile and singular—which is communicated in the voice."[57] That life, singular and fragile, that she locates in the human voice, establishes vulnerability as the necessary starting point for political action. All humans have bodies, and our experience of the world is unquestionably defined by the body that we have. Recognizing our embodied reality is the first step to acknowledging our vulnerability—and the recognition of that shared human experience can serve as the foundation for political action that can genuinely transform a world shaped by the binary and hierarchal logic of patriarchal ideology.

I return now to the ballad invoked at the beginning of this introduction. If we consider the scene of the drowned girl's singing bones, we will find a poetic articulation of the concept of embodied speech. The central scene of this ballad makes literal the philosophical concept that there is no split between the mind and the body, between the

[55] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* 221.
[56] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* 234.
[57] Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice,* 234.

body and the voice, between the material and the spiritual. Through its invocation of a transformative supernatural magic, the ballad is able to make literal a queer imaginary which sees beyond the binary logic that insists upon a separation of body and soul. While logocentric philosophy associates speech with mind or spirit, and asserts that neither of these are material, this ballad shows the failure in this kind of binary and hierarchical logic to adequately account for our sensory and material experience of the world. In the image of the singing bone, the voice and the body are revealed to be one and the same; they are inextricably bound up together, and are therefore equally necessary and important. In this way, the ballad celebrates the physical body and our ability to perceive the material world through our senses. It also illustrates the power of the voice, and the political potential in the act of speaking—as it is through the drowned sister's song that she is able to make known what happened to her and thus bring those responsible to justice.[58] The transformation at the heart of the ballad also exemplifies the kind of transformative and dynamic logic which rejects binaries and refuses stability as a defining category for existence. The potential for transformation that the ballad embraces is indicative of the queer imaginary that I locate in the work of the authors I analyze in this dissertation.

As a song that presumably began its existence in situations of oral performance, was eventually recorded by folklorists and continues to proliferate in both oral and literary versions, "The Twa Sisters" is also an exceptional example of the dynamic nature of oral folklore texts that are defined by their continual transformation. Swedish ballad

[58] In a feminist reading of the ballad, it would be important to acknowledge the part played by the suitor who courts both sisters, and the patriarchal system in which the girls find themselves that makes their only recourse to wealth and value in their culture the marriage system.

scholar Sven-Bertil Jansson has described the ballad's defining characteristic as its "fluidity,"[59] while Susan Stewart writes that: "Of all the singers of Western lyric, the ballad singer is the one most radically haunted by others."[60] Both of these descriptions point to the fluid and dynamic capacity of oral folkloric texts that, through their very existence, invite transformation and reinvention, and thereby represent a multiplicity of different voices coming together, opening up the potential for subversive and critical intervention in the performative act of their re-writing, or re-imagining, in another creative form.

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[59] Jansson, "Ballader, långa och korta," 96.
[60] Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses,* 121.

CHAPTER II

QUEER TRANSFORMATIONS AND TRANSGRESSIVE BODIES IN THE FAIRY TALES OF MARIE-CATHERINE D'AULNOY

On a cold spring day in the north of France in 1666, fifteen-year old Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville is given in an arranged marriage to François de la Motte, Baron d'Aulnoy, a known gambler and libertine, who is thirty years her senior. The marriage would not be a happy one. Three years after the wedding, d'Aulnoy falsely accuses her husband of treason in an attempt to get him executed. Although he lingers in the Bastille for three years, the Baron eventually convinces the court of his innocence and d'Aulnoy is forced to flee France (allegedly avoiding arrest by escaping through a window and hiding in a church). D'Aulnoy spent the next fifteen years living and traveling abroad, possibly working as a spy for the French government, before returning to Paris in 1685, where she became involved in the thriving salon culture of the *précieuses*. In 1690, she published her first novel, *Histoire d'Hippolyte, comte de Duglas,* which contained the first literary fairy tale to be published in France.

Although she published a range of fictionalized memoirs, travel narratives, and a few historical novels over the course of her lifetime, d'Aulnoy is now most remembered for her fairy tales, which depict instances of magical transformation and courtship between humans and the hybrid human-animal characters who have been transformed. In her 1698 tale, "La Chatte Blanche" (The White Cat), a human prince falls in love with a beautiful talking white cat. In another tale from the same collection, a young woman disguises herself as a knight and goes to war on behalf of her aging father, where her skill

in battle and her androgynous appeal make her the object of affection to everyone she meets. In d'Aulnoy's 1697 fairy tale, "L'oranger et l'abeille," (The Bee and the Orange Tree), two lovers transform into a bee and an orange tree, then experience a moment of erotic union when the female bee is enfolded in one of the blossoms of her transformed orange tree lover. Why was d'Aulnoy so interested in tales of animal-human courtship and transformation? What do these stories, and the magical transformations they depict, illustrate about love and desire? About identity? How do they conceptualize the relationship between humans and the natural word?

Working from Rosemary Hennessey's definition of queerness as "ways of 'experiencing' and expressing sensuality and affect that do not conform to the prevailing organization of sexuality,"[1] I argue that magic makes queerness possible in the world of d'Aulnoy's tales because it provides the means by which the characters can transgress the boundaries that dictate heteronormative desire. The transforming bodies of d'Aulnoy's characters act as sites where multiple identities and sexualities intersect, creating queer couplings that insist on multiplicity, and thereby resist a heterosexual conception of sexuality that demands consistency between sex, gender, and desire. In this chapter, I show how d'Aulnoy's fairy tales help us to rethink the category of the human without a reliance on the binary distinctions that have proven so harmful to anyone who falls outside of, or in between, the conventional categories of identity.

In the first section of this chapter, "The Fairy Tale as Subversive Genre," I explain why understanding d'Aulnoy's marginalized position within her social context (not only as a woman in seventeenth-century France, but also, as a woman author) is

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[1] Hennessy, "The Material of Sex," 135.

critical for understanding how d'Aulnoy used fairy tales for the expression of her subversive ideas. I argue that the fairy tale is well suited for the exploration of non-normative identities and beliefs because it was seen as a minor genre during this period in French literature and therefore could depict subversive ideas without risk of censure. Understanding how d'Aulnoy's work is situated with regard to the major literary debates of this period (*La Querelle des anciens et moderns* and *La Querelle des femmes)* reveals the gendered assumptions surrounding the fairy tale as a genre, and illuminates how d'Aulnoy's tales surmount the dualistic terms of both of these debates.

In the second section of this chapter, "Collective Creativity and the Orality of the Salon," I illustrate how d'Aulnoy's fairy tales draw from both ancient and modern, as well as oral and literary sources to create a hybrid text that challenges a binary understanding of the oral and the literary. I argue that the context of the seventeenth-century French salon, in which tales written by their authors were read aloud, is evidence of a different kind of orality than that which is commonly thought of with regard to the fairy tale, which is the orality of the illiterate folk. D'Aulnoy's creation of her tales within the context of the salon is also evidence of a more collective mode of creative production, in which individual tale-tellers collaborated with one another to create and perform their tales, challenging the idea that a literary text must be the product of a single author.[2] I read these formal disruptions of binary thinking as queer because d'Aulnoy's fairy tales demonstrate the playful interrelation between oral and literary elements that

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[2] This is by no means a new idea in fairy tale studies. For example, Jack Zipes makes a similar point in regard to the Grimms' when he mentions that their primary collecting strategy was to invite storytellers to their home and have them tell the tales aloud. Many of their sources were educated young women from the middle class or aristocracy whose families had French origins (such as the Hassenpflug family). See Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 10-11.

can exist within a single text, thus articulating a fluid and polyvalent understanding of the relationship between the oral and the literary, as well as between one and many authors.

The third, and final section of this chapter, "Queer Transformations," explores how the marvelous makes non-normative ideas possible in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales by enabling movement between various binary categories that have been instrumental for upholding patriarchal and heteronormative thought. Through close readings of "Belle-Belle ou Le Chevalier Fortuné," "La Chatte Blanche," "Le Mouton," "L'Oiseau Bleu," "La Biche au bois," and "L'Oranger et l'abeille," I show how d'Aulnoy uses the fairy tale to articulate a queer ontology that defies binary logic and resists the concept of stable identity categories, while also employing a style of writing that is aesthetically queer in its focus on emotions, embodiment, and excess.

The Fairy Tale as Subversive Genre

In spite of her role as one of the major figures in the development of the literary fairy tale, it is d'Aulnoy's contemporary Charles Perrault who has gone down in history as the father of the fairy tale. Not only did she publish the first literary fairy tale in France—appearing as a story within her novel, *Histoire d'Hippolyte, comte de Duglas* in 1690—d'Aulnoy is responsible for coining the term that we use to describe the genre today, referring to her fantastical tales as *contes de fées.* She published her first collection of fairy tales in 1697, and another a year later in 1698. Her stories were immensely popular during her lifetime and in the century following their publication, but their popularity would eventually decline to be replaced by the type of fairy tale made popular by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, which catered to an audience of children and sought

to emulate the simple, naïve voice of an idealized folk population.[3] The enduring popularity of Perrault's stories in the centuries following their publication eclipsed the reality that Perrault was just one of many men and women writing fairy tales at the end of the seventeenth century in France.[4] D'Aulnoy's stories were largely forgotten until feminist fairy tale scholars re-discovered her work in the 1970s.[5]

The fairy tale in France emerged out of the sophisticated and highly literary context of the Parisian salons frequented by aristocratic women at the end of the seventeenth century. Beginning in the 1630s in Paris, a number of aristocratic women started forming salons in their homes and came to refer to themselves as *précieuses*. The *précieuses* were interested in distinguishing themselves from what they saw as the vulgar elements of society—in particular they were interested in correct scruples of behavior and courtly Platonic love, but another primary interest was to gain more independence for women of their class and to be taken seriously as intellectuals. As Jack Zipes writes in *Beauties, Beasts and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales*, "Deprived of access to schools and universities, French aristocratic women began organizing gatherings in their

[3] See Jean Mainil, *Madame d'Aulnoy et le rires des fées: essai sur la subversion féerique et le merveilleux comiques sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, Kimé, 2001), 19-21.

[4] Hannon, *Fabulous Identities*, 12. As Patricia Hannon notes: "Although literary historians and critics alike have canonized only Perrault's tales, it is now widely recognized that seventeenth-century fairy-tale writing was concentrated in the salon milieu and monopolized by aristocratic women and their elite associates, who authored two-thirds, or 74 of the 114 narratives published between 1690 and 1715."
Some of the other major fairy tale writers from this period include: Louise d'Auneuil (?- 1700), Catherine Bernard (1662-1712), Catherine Bédacier Durand (c. 1650-c. 1715), Charlotte-Rose Caumont de La Force (c. 1650-1724), Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier de Villandon (1664-1734), Henriette-Julie de Murat (1670-1716), 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), François-Augustin de Moncrif (1687-1770), Paul François Nodot (?-?), and Jean de Préchac (1676-?). For a comprehensive list of d'Aulnoy's fairy tale contemporaries, see Barchilon, Jacques. *Nouveau Cabinet des Fées I: Le Conte Merveilleux Français de 1690 à 1790, Cent ans de féerie et de poésie ignores de l'histoire littéraire.* Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1978.

[5] See Donald Haase, "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches.* (2004), 30-31.

homes to which they invited other women and gradually men in order to discuss art, literature, and topics important to them such as love, marriage, and freedom."[6] The *précieuses* "were inspired to struggle for more rights and combat the arbitrary constraints placed on their lives in a patriarchal social system."[7] Many of the most gifted writers of the day participated in these early salons, including Mlle de Scudéry, Mlle de Montpensier, Mme de Sévigné, and Mme de Lafayette. These salons continued throughout the seventeenth century and served as the foundations for what would become the salons frequented by Madame d'Aulnoy and Charles Perrault (among others), and which gave birth to the *conte de fée,* or literary fairy tale.

For many women in seventeenth-century France, the fairy tale became a form used to critique patriarchal society. In the coded language of the fairy tale, these women authors could finally articulate their own views on what it meant to be a woman, without fear of censure, especially because even at its conception and at the height of its popularity, the fairy tale was considered a frivolous, minor genre. In the words of many of the authors themselves, their *contes* were mere "bagatelles" or trifles.[8] Folktales were seen as "the province of the uneducated and the illiterate" and for this reason the fairy tales published by Perrault and the other *conteurs* and *conteuses* at this time were largely ignored by the important figures in the literary establishment.[9] In her book, *Fabulous Identities: Women's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-century France,* Patricia Hannon identifies the fairy tale as a particularly rich site to examine the status of women in this

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[6] Zipes, *Beauties*, 2.
[7] Zipes, *Beauties,* 2.
[8] Storer, *La Mode Des Contes de Fées*), 254-255.
[9] Seifert, *Fairy Tales,* 64.

period, not only because fairy tales written in the last decade of the seventeenth century "appeared at a time when interest in defining women's 'nature' so as to better designate their place in the newly reinforced hierarchy, was at its height,"[10] but also because so many of the authors of these tales were women.

Two major debates in France intersected with the emergence of the literary fairy tale as a feminine genre. The first was the *Querelle des Anciens et Moderns.* Nicolas Boileau, who was the leading critic of the literary establishment, was on the side of the "Ancients," championing Greek and Roman literature as superior to the modern period, and the model for contemporary French writers to follow and emulate. By contrast, the sources used by early French fairy tale writers were French folk tales as well as stories from the medieval courtly tradition. The salon writers were anti-classical, situating them clearly on the side of the "Moderns" (Charles Perrault was the leader of the Modern camp).[11] The result of this, according to Jack Zipes, had significantly gendered implications: "since the majority of the writers and tellers of fairy tales were women, these tales displayed a certain resistance toward male rational precepts and patriarchal realms by conceiving pagan worlds in which the final say was determined by female fairies, extraordinarily majestic and powerful."[12] Therefore, one of the reasons women may have been drawn to folk tales for their sources was because they envisioned a different world-order that was not structured by patriarchal ideals derived from the classical texts from Greece and Rome. The moderns sought emancipation from the

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[10] Hannon, *Fabulous,* 22.

[11] Seifert, *Fairy Tales,* 7. "As an elegantly stylized imitation of peasants' folktales, an 'indigenous' French source, the *conte de fées* offered the Moderns both an example and a weapon in their struggle with the Ancients."

[12] Jack Zipes, *Beauties,* 4.

perceived yoke of classical literature, in which Homer and Virgil were seen as fathers, from which the moderns sough to turn away.

The other major debate that played a significant role in French literature at this time, and that is critical for understanding women's relationship to fairy tale production, was the *Querelle des femmes*, in which various male writers attempted to define women's nature. During the seventeenth century, "this prolific discussion on women took many literary forms including panegyrics, moral philosophy, conduct manuals, linguistic tracts, and apologias of modernity."[13] Many of the misogynist commonplaces from this period drew on Aristotle's 'imperfect male' theory, in which men were associated with form or mind, and women with matter or the body.[14] Women were infantilized and seen as having weak minds incapable of sophisticated debate or literary production. Learned women like the *précieuses* were especially under attack. Stereotypes about women from this period also reflected beliefs about the fairy tale, and so it became "the ideal vehicle for any ignorant woman who has confined herself to trifles" to express herself. [15] The assumption that fairy tales were silly trifles meant only for children enabled many of the *conteuses,* like d'Aulnoy, to hide behind the presumed futility and innocence of the genre and use irony and parody in coverts ways to voice their critiques of women's strictly controlled position in French society.[16]

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[13] Hannon, *Fabulous,* 20.

[14] Hannon, *Fabulous,* 27. "Women's inferior position in the marriage hierarchy results from their identification with the body as opposed to the mind, which since Plato and Aristotle, had been equated with men. Indeed, the dominant focal point of this profusion of seventeenth-century texts defining women is the female body, the ubiquitous 'engendering principle,' symbolically enclosed within its 'modesty,' while literally confined to the interiors of household, hospital, prison, and poorhouse."

[15] Mainil, *Madame d'Aulnoy,* 219. « le véhicule idéal où peut s'exprimer toute femme ignorante qui se serait elle-même bornée à des bagatelles » Translation is mine.

[16] See chapter two of Jean Mainil, *Madame d'Aulnoy et le rire des fées. Essai sur la subversion féerique et le merveilleux comique sous l'Ancien Régime,* Pairs, Kimé, 2001.

Another prevailing opinion about women expressed during *La Querelle des femmes* that is important for understanding the feminist implications of d'Aulnoy's tales was the belief that women's bodies were unruly, and needed to be controlled by men. Women were seen as sensual objects for the men to pursue; their main purpose was to bear children.[17] As Anne Duggan has pointed out, thanks to the reprinting of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger's 1486 treatise, *Malleus Maleficarum*, in which women are defined by their uncontrollable lasciviousness and animalistic natures, women were depicted throughout the seventeenth century as animalistic and monstrous.[18] One of the most misogynist texts published during the Quarrel was Boileau's *Satire X* (1694), which describes women's monstrosity manifesting as deceptiveness and excessive sexuality. In these texts, women are reduced to pure sensuality and are seen as incapable of reason. The opposition evoked between sensuality and reason is a defining feature of seventeenth century views on women in France, and one which d'Aulnoy's stories directly challenge in their depiction of sensuous men and reasonable women.

Another influential writer from this period whose rationalist and anti-material views established dualism as a defining principle of seventeenth-century thought was René Descartes. Descartes believed that the language of the body's appetites and passions (what he referred to as *langage animal*) was distinct from the language of universal reason. In Descartes' *Sixième Méditation*, he writes that the body is capable of a certain kind of knowledge, but he concludes that the senses in and of themselves contain no

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[17] Hannon, *Fabulous,* 28. "From the Renaissance onward women's advocates conceptualized only female beauty while lacking a corresponding esthetic standard for men."

[18] Duggan, *Salonnières,* 133. "From beginning to end Kramer and Sprenger allude to women's animal nature, which takes concrete form in the comparison of Woman to the Chimera, a monster with the face of a lion, the belly of a goat, and the tail of a viper (46)."

truth.[19] Thus, the body is the realm of our base animal desires and appetites but contains no knowledge. Descartes' insistence on the mind's mastery over the body influenced much of the writing on women in this period. Women's oppression was therefore rooted in an understanding of the superiority of the mind over the body, and the human over the animal. In d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, embodied experience and sensory pleasure are foregrounded and bodies are depicted as sources of knowledge. D'Aulnoy's dynamic interplay of these categories in her stories, in the way that both men and women are depicted as embodied and rational to varying degrees, completely reimagines the relationship between the mind and the body, and between humans and the natural world. Her stories push beyond the binary and hierarchical thinking about women articulated by many writers in *La Querelle des femmes*.

Collective Creativity and the Orality of the Salon

The hybridity and dynamism depicted in the content of d'Aulnoy's tales exists on a structural level as well in the way her stories contain a mixture of both oral and literary sources, which was a common feature of many fairy tales written by the *conteuses* at the end of the seventeenth century. The dynamic relationship between the oral and the literary that was key to the literary fairy tale's genesis is thanks to the salon setting in which the tales emerged. In this setting, tale-telling and tale-writing went on simultaneously, as the tales were written down first, and then performed. This simultaneity of telling and writing is significant because it shows how the *conteuses* combined both oral and literary elements in their tales, and participated in a unique kind

[19] Descartes, *Meditations*, 90-100.

of orality that involved a dynamic relationship with literary materials and practices, and which was distinct from the orality of the illiterate folk that Perrault sought to emulate in his tales. By engaging with both the oral and the literary in their tales in a transparent way, the fairy tales written by d'Aulnoy and the other *conteuses* who participated in salon culture dissolved the boundary between the oral and the literary often reinforced by patriarchal culture.

The orality employed by the conteuses is different from the orality invoked by Perrault's tales, which were carefully edited by Perrault to give the impression that he had transcribed the tales from an illiterate, peasant storyteller.[20] In contrast to Perrault's tales, which simulate an adult speaking to a child, the oral references in the tales of the *conteuses* recreate the salon setting of highly educated, aristocratic women speaking to one another. As Elizabeth Harries notes in her article, "Simulating Oralities: French Fairy Tales of the 1690s," the *conteuses* "place their tales in the complex and playful ambience of salon conversation. The 'oral' for them is not primarily naïve and primitive, but rather a highly-charged, high-cultural event."[21] They saw, Harries writes, "in the give and take of salon dialogue a useful way to introduce and frame the stories they were writing. Though they may not have collaborated on individual stories […], they situated themselves and their stories in this sparkling, collaborative interchange."[22] Lewis Seifert also emphasizes the communal nature of tale-telling that was fostered by the salonnières: "…the *conteuses*, distinct from the *conteurs,* refer to the intertextual network that connects them as storytellers and writers; so doing, they indicate the extent to which the

[20] See Elizabeth Harries, "Simulating Oralities: French Fairy Tales of the 1690s," *College Literature* 23, no. 2 (June 1996): 101-105.
[21] Harries, "Simulating Oralities," 105.
[22] Harries, "Simulating Oralities," 108.

conte de fées is an example of what Joan DeJean has called 'salon writing' […], the usually anonymous group production of texts in the salon."[23] As Seifert points out, the women writers of the fairy tale differed from their male counterparts in how much they stressed the collaborative and communal nature of their fairy tale creations. For the *conteuses* then, the group production of their texts was critical.

The salon setting that the French fairy tale grew out of also made it possible for the *conteuses* to participate in a practice of collective creativity. I define 'collective creativity' as a creative practice that is cultivated in a group setting and fosters collaborative creative production, rather than creative production that is solely the result of an individual, which has come to be the dominant model of creativity in post-industrial societies. The dynamic exchange of stories and ideas that influenced the *conteuses* in their writing shows that even if the tales were written by individual authors, they were the result of a collective creative practice. Folk tales that circulate orally can also be understood as the result of collaborative creative efforts, as they change shape and gain details through each re-telling. Although this is a different kind of collective creativity than that of the salon fairy tales, what's significant in both contexts is the collective nature of creative production. Both resist the patriarchal view of creativity as the work of the individual genius, demonstrating instead a model of creativity which is relational, dialogic, and that acknowledges the multiple voices involved in its production.

The collective efforts that produced the *conteuses'* tales, and the hybrid nature of the texts themselves, can be seen by looking more closely at the sources for their tales, which especially in the case of d'Aulnoy's tales, involved a combination of both ancient

[23] Seifert, *Fairy,* 9.

and modern, as well as oral and literary antecedents. Many of d'Aulnoy's "modern" French materials included legends and stories that circulated orally. According to Mary Storer nearly all of the *conteuses* were influenced by oral sources to some degree. During the seventeenth century, France was rich in legends tied to particular locations, therefore, as Storer writes: "…it's not difficult to believe that the fairy tale authors at the end of the seventeenth century had at their disposable a considerable mass of legends which had been transmitted orally from generation to generation."[24] Many of these authors were brought up in the countryside, where they would have been exposed to the stories native to that region; even those raised in Paris would have been told fairy tales by their nurses, who came from parts of France rich in folklore and legends.[25] Madame d'Aulnoy's tales derive from traditional stories from the north of France, from Brittany, and from Normandy where she spent her childhood. This can be seen in the frequency of animal characters in her tales, as animals play a big role in the legends of Normandy. The singing bean that makes an appearance in d'Aulnoy's "Finette Cendron" comes from a Norman legend, as well as the ivory mountain Florine must climb in "L'Oiseau Bleu;" and stories about a young girl transformed into a white hind (d'Aulnoy's tale "La Biche au Bois") exist in regions throughout France.[26]

D'Aulnoy's regional influence from Brittany can also be seen in the many similarities between the imaginary of her magical worlds and ideas found in Celtic mythology and literature, especially the emphasis on shape shifting and transformation.

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[24] Storer, *Mode,* 232. Translation is mine. « …on n'a pas de peine à croire que les auteurs de contes de fées de la fin du xviie siècle avaient à leur disposition une masse considérable de légendes qui avaient été transmises oralement de génération en génération »
[25] See Storer, *Mode*, 232-233
[26] See Storer, *Mode*, 232-33.

Celtic scholar Proinsias Mac Cana characterizes the Celtic imagination as one that "makes constant play" with the "relativity of time and space;" where "opposites combine and interchange."[27] Shape shifting is commonplace in Irish and Welsh literature, and in his description of the Celtic otherworld, Mac Cana writes: "perspectives are reversed and brevity becomes length and length brevity as one crosses the tenuous border between the natural and the supernatural."[28] There is a dynamic, fluid quality to beings and places in the Celtic world, which change shape constantly, and where borders are easily crossed.[29] The same kind of transformative dynamism exists throughout d'Aulnoy's tales, and certain magical details, such as the cat's transformation as a result of her beheading in *La Chatte Blanche*, have clear parallels in myths and legends from the Celtic tradition.[30]

In addition to their many oral, folkloric influences, d'Aulnoy's fairy tales were equally influenced by literary sources. Some of the most notable references are the lais of Marie de France, the stories of Merlin and Arthur from *Les Romans de la Table Ronde,* as well as the literary fairy tales published in Italy by Basile in his *Il Pentamerone* in 1637, and by Straparola in *Les Facétieuses Nuits* in 1557.[31] Both Basile and Straparola organized their tales within a larger frame narrative, fictionalizing oral discourse and storytelling within the context of their collections.[32] D'Aulnoy re-imagined individual

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[27] Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, 65.
[28] Mac Cana, *Celtic,* 65.
[29] See Mac Cana, *Celtic,* 86-90,123.
[30] See Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, 98-104.
Disenchantment through beheading exists in the medieval tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, which although most well known as a late 14th-century Middle English chivalric romance, draws on Welsh, Irish, and Breton tradition.
[31] For more details on the influence of the Italian fairy tales, see Storer *Modes,* 244-248; for more details on the influence of the Italian fairy tales, as well as the lais of Marie de France, see Mainil, *Madame d'Aulnoy,* 44
[32] See Zipes, "Cross Cultural Connections," 853-58.

stories from the Italian collections, but also mirrored their structure, in her use of frame narratives for several of her tales, the primary example being her story, “Ile de la félicité”, included in her novel *Hipolyte, Comte du Duglas*. The tale is told by a character in the novel, establishing a convention that, as Elizabeth Harries notes, “many of the later writers of fairy tales follow (though significantly *not* Perrault): the creation of a conversational frame for the tales.”[33] While many of these tales would later be removed from their frame narratives when published in fairy tale collections, the conversational frames gesture to the dialogic salon setting the tales emerged out of, acknowledging both the orality of their origins, as well as their literary roots as stories often situated in novels, or longer literary texts.

Another French literary source that had a major influence on d’Aulnoy’s tales and also contributed to the subversive nature of her stories were the fables of Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695). Like fairy tales, fables were originally written with an adult audience in mind, but were later taken up as literature for children with a moral and pedagogical function. Fables feature animals and inanimate objects that talk and act like humans, and are often full of satire, parody and humor. La Fontaine’s fables were especially known for their use of “pastiche and parody across a wide spectrum of modes and genres,”[34] and fables in both France and England in this period were often used as a means of veiled political critique. In a similar way, the fairy tale in seventeenth-century France—seen as belonging to the domain of “nourrices” et “gouvernantes”[35] and to the frivolous world of women’s chatter—was often able to convey the subversive political

[33] Harries, “Simulating Oralities,” 109.
[34] Rubin, “Fable,” 476-7.
[35] Storer, *Mode,* 255.

views of the tales' marginalized authors without being detected by official culture.[36] The parodic capacity of the fable is key for understanding why D'Aulnoy used the fables of La Fontaine, and how she was able to engage with them in her own tales in a parodic and playful way.

D'Aulnoy's references to La Fontaine in her stories function as parody because her readers would have been familiar with his fables and their parodic dimensions, and therefore would have been able to access the humor entailed by the allusion. In her book, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms,* Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of parodied text."[37] Parody is therefore distinct from satire because it does not necessarily intend to mock or belittle the imitated text. As Hutcheon writes, "There is nothing in *parodia* that necessitates the inclusion of a concept of ridicule, as there is, for instance, in the joke or *burla* of burlesque;"[38] rather, parody is "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity."[39] According to Hutcheon, this distance between the two texts is usually signaled by irony, "But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure of parody's irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual 'bouncing' […] between

[36] Seifert, *Fairy,* 9 "…the vogue of fairy tales enabled the *conteuses* to assert and demonstrate their own vision of women's role in literary culture and society at large. The fairy-tale form was particularly well suited to this task because of its ambivalent marginality. […] It was at once a genre that women could appropriate without threatening male literary figures and a form that enabled them to defend and perpetuate their own *locus* of cultural authority."
[37] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6.
[38] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody,* 32.
[39] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody,* 6.

complicity and distance."[40] The humor that Hutcheon refers to here can be seen throughout d'Aulnoy's stories in her use of both classical and folkloric motifs that would have been familiar to her readers (such as her references to La Fontaine, or the tale of Cupid and Psyche). Her engagement with those sources always contains an element of playfulness, which establishes her tone as parodic rather than satiric by Hutcheon's definition. D'Aulnoy's readers would have been familiar with the various classical and French sources that d'Aulnoy invoked, which is precisely what would have made the humor in this exchange available to them, and where the pleasure comes from, in this type of parodic allusion.

Queer Transformations

Several scholars have already written about the subversive capacity of d'Aulnoy's fairy tales from a feminist perspective. In particular, Jean Mainil has demonstrated the politically subversive tendencies in d'Aulnoy's writing by showing how she uses parody and irony to subvert both the conventions of the fairy tale genre as well as its depiction of gender.[41] Nadine Jasmin has also written about d'Aulnoy's subversion of the gendered stereotypes associated with the fairy tale, identifying how d'Aulnoy uses the feminine conventions of the genre to critique masculine power, and ultimately, give voice to a uniquely "feminine imaginary."[42] Building from Mainil and Jasmin's observations, and from the work of feminist fairy tale scholars who have analyzed d'Aulnoy's tales with an

[40] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody,* 32.
[41] Mainil, *Madame d'Aulnoy*, 27. According to Mainil, d'Aulnoy practices "a fairy-like writing of dissent that refuses to peddle the stereotypes associated with the genre, and which opposes these generic topoi, whether it be compulsory happiness, passivity, weakness or even the cunning of the female character." (Translation is mine.)
[42] Jasmin, *Naissance du conte féminin,* 696.

eye to gender and power relations,[43] I propose a queer reading of the magical transformations in d'Aulnoy's tales, in order to show how they enact a queer imaginary in their depiction of the instability of the binary categories that organize gender, sexuality, and the human relationship to the natural world.

A relatively recent field of scholarly interest, queer fairy-tale studies examines fairy tales through a queer lens, reading the tales for their potential resistance to the heteronormative order. This can mean reading the stories for evidence of gay, lesbian, or transgender characters, but more broadly entails examining the characters and relationships in the stories with the understanding that gender and sexuality do not derive from any kind of natural essence but are socially and culturally determined. As Lewis Seifert writes in his introductory essay to the 2015 special issue of *Marvels & Tales,* "Queer(ing) Fairy Tales": "As forms of resistance to the heteronormative order, queer genders and sexualities aim to destabilize the binaries (such as masculine-feminine, heterosexual-homosexual, dominant-submissive, active-passive) that are so central to upholding normative categories."[44] To read queerly, or to queer a text through interpretation can also refer to reading "against the grain"; in other words, reading with an awareness towards those signs and meanings that are "neglected or obscured by heteronormative interpretations."[45] I use the word queer to refer not necessarily to that which is not heterosexual, but rather that which is non-heteronormative, as in behaviors that are at odds with dominant social and sexual practices.

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[43] See Lewis Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France, 1690-1715: Nostalgic Utopias* (1996); Patricia Hannon, *Fabulous Identities: Women's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France.* (1998); and Anne E. Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (2005).
[44] Seifert, "Introduction," 16.
[45] Seifert, "Introduction," 16.

My use of the term queer is also based on the definition given by Annamarie Jagose when she writes that queer refers to "those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability—which claims heterosexuality as its origin when it is more properly its effect—queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender, and desire."[46] In other words, sexual and gender identities are not essential, biological givens, but rather derive from culturally constructed sex/gender systems. The various mismatches between the categories that Jagose describes are some of those that I explore in this chapter, as well as mismatches between some categories not named by Jagose, but which still intersect in various ways with desire in d'Aulnoy's tales. There are four major binary categories that d'Aulnoy's stories subvert and expand beyond that I explore and link in distinct ways: male/female, human/nature, mind/body, and rational/emotional (or reason/the senses). In enabling movement between these categories through her characters' magical transformations, and mixing and combining them in different ways, d'Aulnoy's stories articulate queer conceptions of identity and sexuality that are not restricted by binary thinking.

Resisting stability is a primary feature of d'Aulnoy's tales; of the twenty-five fairy tales that make up her *oeuvre*, twelve feature animal-human transformations. Magical transformations are of course not unique to d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, nor are the animal-human relationships that feature so prominently in her work. D'Aulnoy's stories are part of a tradition known to folklorists as the *Animal Bridegroom* cycle of tales, in

[46] Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 3.

which a human is in a romantic relationship with an animal.[47] Versions of these tales abound in cultures around the world. One of the most famous is the French literary fairy tale "La Belle et la Bête," made popular by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 version of the tale.[48] One of the earliest literary versions of this tale type is the myth of Cupid and Psyche (first appearing in print in the second century A.D., in Lucius Apuleius's collection *The Golden Ass*), which serves as a clear antecedent to the French fairy tale writers' tales of transformation, including d'Aulnoy's.[49] So why are animal-bridegroom tales so enduringly popular? As Maria Tatar notes in her preface to a collection of animal bridegroom tales from 2017, these tales "embody the mind/body problem, along with many other binaries that shadow it, including the hierarchy that sets *zoe* over *bios,* instinct over intellect, social life over brute animal existence, rational consciousness over intuitive know-how."[50] In their function as mediators between nature and culture, animal brides and grooms therefore enable us "to think through our relationship to 'otherness.' They are 'impossible' hybrid creatures that help us to negotiate that divide, to construct our own realities and identities through the dialectical interplay between the animal and the human kingdom."[51]

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[47] In *The Types of International Folktales* (the definitive tale type index created by folklorists Anti Arne and Stith Thompson), tales featuring animal bridegrooms are divided into two different categories according to each character's gender. Tale Type ATU 425, known as The Search for the Lost Husband, includes stories about human women in relationships with animal men. The corresponding tale type, in which the genders are reserved, is ATU 400 The Man on a Quest for His Lost Wife.

[48] The first literary version was written by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and published in 1740. Beaumont abridged the tale considerably and published her version in a publication for children, *Magasin des enfants.*

[49] D'Aulnoy's tale *Le Serpentin Vert* ("The Green Serpent") even features a scene where the main character, Laidronette, reads a copy of Cupid and Psyche and uses the tale to inform her decisions of how to treat her own invisible, monstrous lover.

[50] Tatar, *Beauty*, x.

[51] Tatar, *Beauty,* xxvii.

While several of d'Aulnoy's tale-writing contemporaries also used animal-human transformations in their tales,[52] d'Aulnoy returned to the theme of the animal bride and groom "almost obsessively," as Marina Warner writes, seizing the opportunities afforded by the theme of animal metamorphosis "to create a world of pretend in which happiness and love are sometimes possible for a heroine, but elusive and hard-won."[53] Although magic manifests in a variety of ways in d'Aulnoy's fairy tale worlds populated with fairies, ogres, giants, and enchanters, metamorphosis is perhaps the most prominent manifestation of the marvelous in her tales. Seifert defines the marvelous as "a context that suspends the rules and constraints of reality."[54] In his study of fantastic literature, Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes the marvelous from the fantastic, writing that while the fantastic exists in the reader's hesitation between a natural and a supernatural explanation of narrative events, the marvelous is "the supernatural accepted" both by the readers, and the characters in the story.[55] Thus, the powerful fairies and enchanters that govern d'Aulnoy's fairy tales worlds are as naturally occurring as the magical metamorphoses of the characters.

The marvelous worlds d'Aulnoy imagines are characterized by dynamism and transmutation as characters' bodies shift easily between one form and another. Thanks to these multiple instances of transformation (not only from human to animal, but also, from human to insect, as well as inanimate object), d'Aulnoy's fairy tales articulate a wide variety of mismatches between sex, gender, and desire—as well as species. In so doing,

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[52] See for example the fairy tales of Catherine Bernard (1662-1712), Eustache Le Noble (1643-1711), Henriette-Julie de Murat (1670-1716), and Jean de Mailly (?-1724).
[53] Warner, *Beast to the Blonde,* 286.
[54] Seifert, *Fairy,* 22.
[55] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 42.

they articulate a world of queer desire that is made possible by enchantment. Desire between the transformed characters is queer because it exists outside of, or beyond, the binary categories that organize desire under heteronormativity. Identity is also queered through the constant transformations of the characters. A queer understanding of identity, which imagines identity to be in constant flux, takes literal shape in the magical world of d'Aulnoy's tales.

We can see an example of how both sexuality and identity are queered in d'Aulnoy's fairy tale, "Belle-Belle ou Le chevalier Fortuné" ("Belle-Belle; or The Knight Fortuné") (1698), which tells the story of Belle-Belle, the youngest daughter of a nobleman, who goes to war disguised as a handsome knight to fight in her father's stead on behalf of the king. At a glance, this story would seem to be d'Aulnoy's most overtly queer for its depiction of the cross-dressing warrior woman who reveals the performative nature of gender.[56] Even though the tale ends with the expected heterosexual marriage, its heroine turns the world of heterosexual desire and normative gender performance upside down, not only by excelling at the masculine gender identity she performs (thus revealing that gender identity is a performance and not an essential, stable category), but also, by becoming the object of desire of nearly everyone she meets regardless of their gender—thus revealing that desire exists outside of the strictures of heteronormative sexuality. While this story may operate in a world dictated by binary logic, it is queer in the way it

[56] The story has clear antecedents in the Italian fairy tales by Straparola, "Constanza/Constanzo" (1550/53), and Basile, "The Three Crowns," (1634/36), and plays with the familiar trope of the warrior woman, which exists in fairy tales and ballads the world over. In her study of the Anglo-American version of the Female Warrior, Dianne Dugaw describes this figure as a "polyvalent heroine" because she has it "both ways—'female' and 'male'" (2). As Dugaw argues in *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry: 1650-1850*, the Female Warrior story "exposes to view and subverts—at least by implication—the structuring according to gender of its world" (4). Even if the tale ends with a restoration of the heterosexual, male-dominated world order, "the story's middle, by turning that world upside down, calls into question its immutability" (4). The same can be said of d'Aulnoy's story.

destabilizes the fixed nature of those binary categories, demonstrating instead how identities and sexualities can shift, even within a binary framework.

"Belle-Belle" queers the concept of the gender binary by revealing that gender is performative, and therefore, not an essential or fixed identity category. By performative, I am referring to Judith Butler's concept of gender as described in her 1988 essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." Butler defines gender attributes as performative, as in actions one performs that constitute one's gender, rather than expressive of a pre-existing or essential identity. As Butler writes:

> The distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction.[57]

A person's gender is therefore only ever as "true" as the performance they give, as opposed to the way gender is understood in the popular imagination as "a substantial core which might well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex."[58] If, as Butler posits, gender attributes "are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal."[59] In other words, gender is created through the acts of the performer, giving the impression that those acts reflect a true inner essence of gender identity when in fact gender is a fiction.

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[57] Butler, "Performative Acts," 528.
[58] Butler, "Performative Acts," 528.
[59] Butler, "Performative Acts," 528.

D'Aulnoy's portrayal of the Chevalier Fortuné demonstrates Butler's theory in action by referring to the character with a different name and with different pronouns depending on which gender the character is performing. The fact that the narrator refers to Belle-Belle as Fortuné, and switches from feminine to masculine pronouns, communicates to us that Belle-Belle truly *is* Fortuné during these moments in the story, rather than Belle-Belle in disguise. Significantly, the character's transformation from Belle-Belle to Fortuné only extends as far as his clothes—the character's body is not transformed; instead, he is given a horse and a trunk of fine clothes from a helpful fairy. Fortuné's gender is not determined by the body under his clothes but rather by his appearance and by the effectiveness of his performance, thus revealing that gender identity is only ever as real as the performance we give.[60] In this way, d'Aulnoy's story presents a queer understanding of gender in its depiction of gender as something fluid and shifting, rather than a fixed and essential identity category.

In addition to its depiction of gender identity as something that's fluid, "Belle-Belle ou le Chevalier Fortuné" depicts sexuality as something that is both fluid and polysemous (defined in this context as the coexistence of several sexualities simultaneously). Belle-Belle is described as beautiful at the story's start but when she transforms into the Chevalier Fortuné, her sexual appeal seems to increase significantly. The sexual appeal of the cross-dressed character to both men and women is a

[60] The phenomenon of cross-dressing, and in particular, women disguised as men, is of course not unique to d'Aulnoy's tale, and was a recurring feature in French theatre of the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly in French and Italian comedies performed in France up to and beyond the end of the reign of Louis XIV. See Georges Forestier, *Esthétique de l'identité dans le théâtre français (1550-1680): le déguisement et ses avatars* (Geneva: Droz, 1981); and Jan Clarke, "Female Cross-Dressing on the Paris Stage, 1673-1715," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35, no. 3 (July 1999): 238-50, for a discussion of plays in which female to male cross-dressing is used to create sexual innuendo.

characteristic feature of this type of tale, as demonstrated in Straparola's and Basile's versions, where both the king and queen fall for the disguised protagonist. However, in d'Aulnoy's version, it is not only the king and his sister who develop an attachment for the charming and handsome Fortuné, but also the queen's confidante, Floride, as well as all the ladies at court. D'Aulnoy's love of excess makes it so that Fortuné is not just loved by one woman, but *all* the women he encounters, distinguishing her portrayal of the cross-dressed protagonist from her Italian predecessors:

> On his part, the king overwhelmed him with favors, and he found nothing to his liking unless it was done by the handsome chevalier. Meanwhile the queen, deceived by his dress, seriously thought about how she could arrange a secret marriage with him. […] However, she was not the only one who entertained such feelings for Fortuné. The most beautiful women at the court were taken with him. He was swamped with tender letters, assignations, presents, and a thousand gallantries […]. No matter how much he tried to be modest at the great entertainments of the court, he always distinguished himself. He won the prize at all the tournaments. He killed more game than anyone else when he went hunting. He danced at all the balls with more grace and skill than any of the courtiers. In short, it was delightful to see and hear him.[61]

The implication in this passage is that Fortuné's appeal is based on the fact that he is in possession of the virtues of both sexes. D'Aulnoy's love of detail helps communicate this in her list of his virtues: He is good at hunting as well as dancing; he is kind and courteous, as well as strong and clever. His appeal is universal because his gender expresses both masculine and feminine characteristics. Therefore, we might say that it is Fortuné's ability to inhabit *both* sides of the gender binary simultaneously that makes him so attractive to the other characters. The fact that Fortuné excels at both masculine and feminine activities is evidence of the simultaneity of his masculine and feminine sides; thus, his gender identity can be understood as polysemous in that his successful

[61] Zipes, *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 185.

performance of both genders suggests that Fortuné is as much a woman as he is a man. Even the story's title alludes to this duality: "Belle-Belle; *or* The Chevalier Fortuné." This simultaneity of both sides of the gender binary within Belle-Belle's character suggests that a hybrid or polysemous gender presentation is more appealing than a single gender presentation.

Sexuality is also queered in the story through Fortuné's attraction to the king. The narrator tells us: "Fortuné could not help staring at the king from time to time. He was the handsomest prince in the world, and his manners were most engaging. Belle-Belle, who had not renounced her sex with her dress, felt sincerely drawn to him."[62] Here the narrator reminds us that although Fortuné appears to be a man, his sexual desires still correspond with those of a heterosexual woman. At first glance, this comment from the narrator may seem to undermine the queer potential of the sexuality depicted in the story by reinforcing that Belle-Belle's "true" sex remains underneath her masculine appearance as evidenced by her attraction to men. However, if Belle-Belle *is* Fortuné in so far as she successfully performs Fortuné's masculinity, then her attraction towards the king may be understood as homosexual as much as it is heterosexual. The character's dual gender expression therefore creates a duality of sexualities, as Belle-Belle/Fortuné's desire for the king is simultaneously heterosexual and homosexual. What makes this story queer then is the way it illustrates the fluidity of both gender and sexual identity. Because gender is exposed as a performance, we see that it is unstable and liable to change based on the individual's performance; and because sexual identity is defined by gender identity

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[62] Zipes, *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition,* 184.

(which can change based on performance), sexual identity is just as fluid and potentially polysemous as gender identity within the context of this tale.

While “Belle-Belle” may be d’Aulnoy’s most obviously queer narrative for its depiction of the fluid and shifting nature of gender and sexuality, the story is still operating within a binary framework. It is d’Aulnoy’s animal transformation tales that best illustrate the queerness of d’Aulnoy’s magical worlds because they depict a world in which boundaries between all categories are constantly shifting and dissolving. When hierarchical boundaries shift and dissolve, normative power dynamics are reversed and instead of relationships being dictated by violence and domination, equality and mutuality become the defining characteristics. In these tales, the magical transformations of the characters articulate a world where sensuality, excess, and embodiment are just as important as rationality, limitation, and reason, and in which the natural world has as much value as the human world.

One such tale in which sensuality, embodiment and the natural world are foregrounded is d’Aulnoy’s 1698 tale “La Chatte Blanche” (“The White Cat”), in which a prince falls in love with a beautiful talking white cat. At the end of the tale, the beautiful cat is revealed to be a human princess under an enchantment, and after she transforms back to her human form, the two are wed. Although the two protagonists both end up as humans at the story’s conclusion, the prince, significantly, falls in love with Chatte Blanche *as a cat,* before he has any knowledge of her human origins. The prince’s attraction to her physical form as a cat is evident on their first meeting:

> The prince was so astonished, he did not know what to think. The figure in black approached, and lifting her veil, he caught sight of the most beautiful little white

> cat that ever has been or will be. She looked very young and very sad, and she began to meow so softly and sweetly that it went straight to his heart.[63]

The prince is immediately struck by Chatte Blanche's physical beauty, as well as how she carries herself. Her status as animal does not deter the prince from desiring her. The fact that it is her meowing—a distinctly un-human sound—that goes "straight to his heart" underscores the prince's attraction to her animal qualities. This appreciation for her animal body and the desire he has for it subverts the anthropocentric, hierarchical relationship in which humans are imagined to be superior to animals. In doing so, it further disrupts the hierarchy of mind over body—as his appreciation for her physical form is a key element of his love.

The prince's sensual appreciation for Chatte Blanche in her feline form not only illustrates his desire for her animal body, it also explicitly connects her beauty to her animal body, expanding the category of beauty beyond the human. The equality that's established between the categories of animal and human is further demonstrated by the fact that the prince is willing to be transformed into a cat, so he and Chatte Blanche might remain together:

> The prince had forgotten even his own country. […] He regretted sometimes that he was not a cat, so he could spend his life in this good company. "Alas!" he said to White Cat, "How it will pain me to leave you, I love you so dearly! Either become a girl or make me a cat."[64]

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[63] D'Aulnoy, *Contes*, 767. Translation is mine.

[64] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 763. Translation is mine. The French reads: "Le prince avait oublié jusqu'à son pays. […] Il regrettait quelquefois de n'être pas chat, pour passer sa vie dans cette bonne compagnie. « Hélas ! disait-il à Chatte Blanche, que j'aurai de douleurs de vous quitter, je vous aime si chèrement ! Ou devenez fille ou rendez-moi chat."

The prince’s willingness to give up his human form for his beloved (expressed in his plea to Chatte Blanche to “make me a cat”) is evidence not only of the power of his feelings, but also of the way d’Aulnoy problematizes the hierarchal relationship between animals and humans. It also demonstrates the relational dynamism and utterly fluid nature of d’Aulnoy’s magical world, in the sense that the prince’s human physical form is less important to him than his love for Chatte Blanche. His desire for her is so powerful he can love her either as a human or as a cat himself—the specifics of which physical form he takes are irrelevant. In this way, the story also underscores the impossibility of a stable or consistent identity. Of course, there is also a comic element to the prince’s words here, and from this example we can also get a sense of the playful nature of d’Aulnoy’s writing.

Just as d’Aulnoy’s transformed characters’ express both the animal and human parts of themselves, they equally emphasize the rational and sensory parts of their identities, dismantling the hierarchy that dictates that the mind is superior to the body, establishing instead the equal value of both. In spite of their transformations, d’Aulnoy’s transformed animal characters retain many of their human characteristics. One of the most critical of these faculties is the ability to speak and reason. In “La Chatte Blanche,” in addition to being capable of extremely eloquent speech, the white cat is also a savvy politician, and an accomplished poet. D’Aulnoy’s depiction of the prince’s desire for Chatte Blanche therefore not only gives value to her animal body through the prince’s enraptured descriptions of her physical form, it makes clear that his desire for her is equally a result of her intelligence and her many refined skills, including her ability to converse and write poetry, as well as her accomplishments as a political leader,

governing her kingdom of cats and rats. The prince comments several times throughout the story on her various talents, voicing his surprise that she, a simple cat, could be endowed with such distinctly intellectual abilities:

> It is true that White Cat was possessed of agreeable, sweet, and almost universal talent. She was wiser than a cat is allowed to be. The prince was sometimes astonished by her knowledge. 'No,' he said, 'it is not natural for you to possess all these marvelous qualities I discover in you. If you love me, charming pussy, explain to me by what miracle you are enabled to think and speak so perfectly, that you might be elected a member of the most famous Academy of Arts and Sciences?'[65]

The prince's insistence that it is not "natural" for Chatte Blanche to have these abilities is evidence of seventeenth century associations between women and animals—neither of whom were believed to be capable of reason. Patricia Hannon points out that the Prince's comment here that Chatte Blanche belongs in the Academy of Arts and Sciences is a clear reference to the fact that at this time in France women were not allowed membership. Therefore, the fact that Chatte Blanche, who is both a woman *and* an animal can reason, points to what is subversive about d'Aulnoy's human-animal characters, which is that they represent a hybrid of that which Cartesian thought believed were fundamentally separate, which is the mind and the body.

Furthermore, the prince's declaration that it is a "miracle" (*prodige*) that Chatte Blanche has these "marvelous" (*merveilleux*) abilities stresses that it is magic that has made it possible for Chatte Blanche to occupy a position of power, which otherwise would be impossible for her in reality (i.e. outside the genre of the marvelous). Only in

[65] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 767. Translation is mine. "Il est vrai que Chatte Blanche avait l'esprit agréable, liant, et presque universel. Elle était plus savante qu'il n'est permis à une chatte de l'être. Le prince s'en étonnait quelquefois : « Non, lui disait-il, ce n'est point une chose naturelle que tout ce que je remarque de merveilleux en vous ; si vous m'aimez, charmante Minette, apprenez-moi par quel prodige vous pensez et vous parlez si juste, qu'on pourrait vous recevoir dans les académies fameuses des plus beaux esprits."

the fairy tale, where magic gives desire concrete shape, can she operate in a paradigm not dictated solely by rationality. Thus, we see here how magic takes Chatte Blanche's talents—her intelligence, her knowledge, and her political abilities—and gives them a context in which she can put them to use; in her magical kingdom of cats and rats she can be as powerful as any human king. The prince's choice of words here—his references to miracles and marvels—points to the tale's awareness of its own inner logic and the integral role that magic plays in the enactment of its subversive ideas. This kind of self-referential, meta-commentary is typical of d'Aulnoy's writing throughout her fairy tales.

Chatte Blanche's success as a political ruler is another manifestation of the successful union of the human and the animal within her, as well as the equal weight given in her character between the mind and the body. Throughout the story, we are witness to Chatte Blanche's skill as a ruler, and it's significant that she rules over her kingdom without a man by her side. At the story's conclusion Chatte Blanche does not give up her political power in order to marry her true love, she retains her power, and in fact, is so powerful herself that she does not *need* the inheritance from her husband—it is rather she who bestows land and power upon her betrothed, and his entire family, thereby mitigating a crisis of succession between her lover and his brothers:

> "My liege," said she to him, "I come not to deprive you of a throne you fill so worthily. I was born heiress to six kingdoms; permit me to offer one to you, and to give one to each of your eldest sons. I ask of you no other recompense then your friendship and this young prince for my husband. Three kingdoms will be quite enough for us."[66]

[66] The translation here is by J. R. Planché from d'Aulnoy, *D'Aulnoy's Fairy Tales* (Philadelphia: McKay, 1923), 356. The original French reads: "Seigneur, lui dit-elle, je ne suis pas venue pour vous arracher un trône que vous remplissez si dignement, je suis née avec six royaumes: permettez que je vous en offre un, et que j'en donne autant à chacun de vos fils. Je ne vous demande pour toute récompense que votre amitié, et ce jeune prince pour époux. Nous aurons encore assez de trois royaumes."

It is clear from this moment that she is marrying the prince not for material or political gain, as was the reality for many aristocratic women in seventeenth-century France (including d'Aulnoy herself), but purely for love. This ending for d'Aulnoy's transgressive heroine demonstrates that women should be able to determine their own fates when it comes to matters of the heart—a theme that recurs throughout d'Aulnoy's body of work. The ending to "La Chatte Blanche" suggests is that it is Chatte Blanche's status as a cat that enables her to rule successfully without a man for so many years. It is therefore the fusion of her animal *and* human characteristics—her feline beauty, as well as her intelligence and political skill—that makes her such a successful ruler. In Chatte Blanche, d'Aulnoy blends the sensual and the rational, and the animal with the human to create a character who illustrates the dynamic and hybrid nature of identity, and the fluid nature of desire.

Another story that establishes equality between animals and humans, as well as between the mind and the body, is d'Aulnoy's tale "La Biche au bois" ("The Hind in the Wood"), in which the beautiful Désirée is transformed by a fairy's curse into a white hind. The names of the characters are clearly coded for their masculine and feminine qualities—with Guerrier's name alluding to the masculine attribute of war (Warrior), and Désirée alluding the feminine quality of being desired. Her betrothed, Prince Guerrier, sees her as a hind without recognizing who she is, but falls in love with her all the same. Similar to the prince in "La Chatte Blanche" who loves the white cat before he knows the truth about her human identity, Prince Guerrier loves Princess Désirée *as a hind*. Sexuality as it is represented in the story is queer in the sense that it transgresses the animal/human boundary and like "La Chatte Blanche" places value on the animal side of

the animal/human divide, as well as on the animal body. Not only is the hierarchical relationship that dictates these categories upended, but like in “La Chatte Blanche,” a new concept of identity is articulated through the character’s magical transformation, which reveals the hybrid and dynamic nature of identity. As Lewis Seifert explains, metamorphoses in French fairy tales “show the body to be a socially constructed unit of significance lacking an inherent essence.”[67] In other words, these transformations illustrate how the body, and the identities that rely upon that body, are not essential but socially constructed. Thus, in d’Aulnoy’s animal transformations, identities become hybrid, in the sense that they are comprised of different elements (both animal and human, both sensual and rational) and are revealed to be unstable. Identities are as mutable as the constantly transforming bodies that give them physical form.

The prince’s attraction to Désirée in “La Biche au bois” is queer because it reveals the mutability of his desire for her, in its refusal to conform to only one physical form. Just as her dynamic and hybrid body is queer in its expression of both animal and human characteristics, so is the prince’s desire for her fluid and shifting body. The prince first falls in love with Désirée as a human (upon seeing her portrait), then falls in love with her again as a hind. The notion of fluidity is especially relevant in Désirée’s case because she is a hind by day and a human by night. She therefore spends her time equally split between her human and her animal form, shifting back and forth between the two. The multiplicity of Guerrier’s desire is the result of the fluidity of Désirée’s shifting identity; in Guerrier’s regard she is both girl and hind, and he loves her no less because of this. Through this example, we can also understand how magic is key to representing

[67] Seifert, *Fairy,* 36.

queerness in the story. The fluid nature of identity and the dynamic nature of queer desire (in the sense that desire is understood to be multiple and adaptable to changing forms; love and desire can exist simultaneously in one person in multiple ways; and love and desire can be experienced beyond the category of the human) move from being abstract concepts to becoming a material reality in the story. When a character's body literally transforms (in this case, Désirée physically becomes a deer), the story makes concrete the idea that queer identity (and also queer desire) is understood to be multiple, fluid, and dynamic.

Similar to "La Chatte Blanche," "La Biche au Bois" also equalizes the hierarchical relationship between the mind and the body. By making Désirée's animal body as expressive as rational human speech, the story establishes the body as a source of eloquence and knowledge. The transformed Désirée does not maintain her ability to speak like Chatte Blanche, but she is still in possession of her human faculties in her ability to think rationally and express emotion.[68] While Désirée may not possess the ability to speak, she is so expressive in her newly transformed body that she is able to make herself understood quite easily through her sounds and gestures; she also retains her ability to understand human speech. When Désirée is reunited with her devoted lady in waiting, Giroflée, the girl is able to recognize her mistress thanks to the expressive capacity of Désirée's new body:

> She looked at it earnestly, and saw, with much surprise, large tears falling from its eyes. She no longer doubted that it was her dear princess; she took her feet, and kissed them with as much respect and affection as though she was kissing her hands. She spoke to her, and was convinced that the hind understood her, but she

[68] Like Chatte Blanche, Désirée is depicted as a rational and level-headed character, in contrast to her lover in the tale, Guerrier, who exhibits such excessive emotions when he first sees Désirée's portrait that he talks to the portrait as if it were Désirée herself, eventually falling into a love sick stupor that nearly kills him when he is told he will have to wait three years to marry Désirée.

> could not answer her; their tears and sighs were redoubled. Giroflée promised her mistress that she would not leave her anymore. The hind made a thousand little signs with her head and her eyes, which meant, she should be very glad of it, and that it would console her for some of her troubles.[69]

In his reading of this scene, Jacques Barchilon argues that by virtue of her animal form, Désirée is able to express herself more eloquently than if she were a human. Through her tears and sighs she is better able to express her emotions than she could with words.[70] In making the hind's sensual expressive body a source of knowledge, d'Aulnoy not only demonstrates the importance of reason *and* the senses, she establishes the body as equally valuable to the mind. Furthermore, the fact that it is Désirée's *animal* body which communicates so powerfully to her friend illustrates the value in animals, and the natural world, thus destabilizing the hierarchy that suggests humans are superior to animals.

Désirée's animal body, and her connection with the natural world, makes her relationship with Guerrier queer in another sense as well, which is that rather than bringing about the kind of savage and unbridled sexuality often associated with nature, Désirée's transformation into a hind inspires her lover to treat her with tenderness and affection. Although he does shoot her in the ankle the first time he sees her in the woods as a hind (not knowing that she is his beloved Désirée), when Prince Guerrier finally catches up to her, instead of doing further violence to her as one might expect, he tenderly embraces her, and then makes her a bed of soft boughs and flower petals for her to lie on:

> He evidently saw she had lost all her strength; she was lying down like a poor half-dead little animal, and only expecting her life to be taken by the hands of her

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[69] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 319.

[70] Barchilon, *Nouveau Cabinet des Fées*, 44." "Il est bien clair que la jeune biche—même sans le secours de la parole humaine—exprime ses sentiments amoureux d'une manière directe (sans pudeurs ni réserve) et plus sensuelle que si elle était humaine. Ce sont des passages de ce genre qui donnent l'impression d'une inconsciente révélation de sensualité animale. "

> conqueror; but instead of being so cruel, he began to caress her. 'Beautiful hind,' said he, 'do not be afraid: I will take thee with me, and thou shalt follow me everywhere.' He cut some branches from the trees, twisted them skillfully, and covered them with moss; scattered roses upon them, which he gathered from some bushes in full blossom, then took the hind in his arms, laid her head upon his neck, and placed her gently upon the boughs; after which he sat down near her, seeking from time to time the finest grass, which he gave to her, and which she ate from his hand.[71]

Désirée's appearance as a wounded hind prompts the prince to treat her with tenderness, exhibiting his love for her through intimate acts of care-taking (making her a bed, feeding her grass from his hand), rather than the violence and domination we would expect from a male hunter pursuing his prey, a motif which features prominently in the classical tradition, perhaps most notably in so many episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.[72] This scene demonstrates D'Aulnoy's use of parody because of the way she invokes a literary motif that would have been familiar to her readers and then turns it on its head, thereby subverting their expectations. In this way, d'Aulnoy queers the gender dynamics typically associated with the amorous hunt, as the male character, who normally exhibits dominance over the female character in this scenario, instead treats her with gentleness and care—traits that are traditionally associated with the female partner.

The fact that the prince is able to treat Désirée with *more* kindness, love, and affection when she is a hind also reveals the ways in which heterosexual desire is queered by the character's transformation, and therefore how the presence of magic in the story makes this kind of queer desire possible. Normative seventeenth-century heterosexuality dictates that the male partner should exert dominance and control over his female partner,

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[71] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 323.

[72] See for example Jupiter's pursuit of Io, and Europa; Apollo's pursuit of Daphne; Pan's pursuit of Syrinx; Tereus' rape of Philomela, and Pluto's abduction of Proserpina to name just a few.

and that the value of the female body lies in its reproductive capacity.[73] But in this scene when the lover finally catches up with his beloved, not only is there no violence or dominance exerted against her, there is no sexual act at all. What's also queer then about this amorous exchange is that it is de-sexualized; the focus is on intimacy, tenderness, and care, rather than on the sexual exchange that we expect to occur in the moment the hunter catches up with his prey. Desire is expressed by focusing on the female partner's comfort, rather than on the male partner's sexual satisfaction or dominance. The fact that this non-normative expression of desire is made possible by magic illustrates the way in which enchantment is queer in the world of d'Aulnoy's tales, and how this queer enchantment asserts the value in sensuality, embodiment, and the human connection to the natural world.

The fact that men are also subject to animal transformations in d'Aulnoy's tales is another way that these stories push back against the Aristotelian logic that associates women with the body and the natural world, and men with rationality and the mind. In d'Aulnoy's 1697 tale, "Le Mouton" ("The Ram"), an exiled princess discovers a realm of ghosts and talking sheep ruled over by a beautiful ram, who is actually a king transformed by a fairy's curse. What's remarkable about this tale is how much d'Aulnoy emphasizes the sensuality and beauty of the ram and his surroundings, which one might expect to be repulsive and even monstrous based on seventeenth-century ideas about the natural world. Instead, d'Aulnoy not only aligns the natural world with the masculine by having a male character take the shape of an animal, she depicts the ram and his kingdom as sites of elegance and grace, in accordance with the pastoral tradition of the seventeenth

[73] See Hannon, *Fabulous Identities,* 22-24.

century. The scene that greets the princess Merveilleuse when she sees the ram for the first time is a distinctly luxurious one, and it's characterized by an abundance of material wealth symbolized by jewelry and furniture:

> What was her surprise, on arriving in an open space surrounded by trees, to see a large ram, whiter than snow, whose horns were gilt, who had a garland of flowers around his neck, his legs entwined with ropes of pearls of prodigious size, and chains of diamonds hung about him, and who was reposing on a couch of orange blossoms. A pavilion of cloth of gold suspended in the air sheltered him from the rays of the sun.[74]

This sensual account of the ram focuses our attention on the material world, and in so doing, fosters an appreciation of the body—more specifically, the ram's animal body, which is depicted as appealing for its snow-white color and gilded horns. It is particularly striking to read about the traditionally feminine adornments of flowery garlands and necklaces of jewels bedecking a male character. The ram is represented as an object of desire for the precious female character's gaze: reclining on a couch covered in orange blossoms and draped with diamonds and pearls. Placing the male character in this typically feminine pose articulates a more expansive kind of masculinity, in which the material, sensual aspects of the male body are foregrounded. It not only undoes the patriarchal thinking that defines women by their bodies, it also equalizes men and women by showing the sensuality men are capable of. What's more, the femininity of this sensual description adds a layer of queerness to the desiring female gaze in bestowing feminine characteristics to the male object of her desire.

In addition to depicting a sensual figure and an object of female desire, this tale also represents the king as someone who is made vulnerable by his body in a way that is

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[74] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 165.

more frequently seen in female characters. The reason the king is cursed to take the form of a ram is because he refuses the affections of the fairy Ragotte, whose infatuation with the king seems to be the result of his attractive appearance. She does not love him for his power and wealth as king; as she tells him in confessing her affections: "Consider how low I stoop! 'Tis I who make this confession of my weakness to thee, who, great king as thou mayest be, art less than ant compared to a fairy like me."[75] Her decision to transform him into a sheep is a deliberately cruel one, intended to strip him of the power he wielded as a human king: "I will make thee know my power; thou art a lion at present, thou shall become a sheep."[76] However, it's clear she also punishes him for bewitching her with his good looks. As she tells him: "Thou shalt be a sheep for five years [...] while far from thee, and no longer beholding thy handsome face, I will brood only over the hate I owe thee."[77] Thus, the king is punished by the fairy for his beautiful human body, and cursed with a body that strips him of his former power and renders him all the more vulnerable in his form as a sheep.

While he remains beautiful even as a ram, he no longer holds the same power he had as a human king, who was adored by his subjects and feared and envied by his neighbors; instead, he rules over a realm of shadows and his governing powers are made a mockery of by having sheep as subjects. The king's humiliation is made complete by the tale's tragic ending. After returning to her father's palace, Merveilleuse is locked inside, and the ram is refused entry at the palace gates, "but as everyone was now aware of her adventures, and by no means desired that she should return to the realms of the

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[75] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 168.
[76] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 169.
[77] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 169.

ram, they harshly refused to admit him to her presence."[78] Unable to reach his beloved, the ram dies of a broken heart on the palace steps. The tale's tragic ending emphasizes the vulnerable position the ram finds himself in because of his animal form. He is limited by his body and restricted from privileges that would be granted to him as a human man. The ram's death is a somber demonstration of the tragedy that can result from denying individuals rights and privileges based solely on their appearance. It isn't difficult then to trace a link here between the ram's predicament and women who are defined and restricted by their bodies under patriarchy.

Similarly, in d'Aulnoy's 1697 tale, "L'Oiseau Bleu" ("The Blue Bird"), King Charmant is stripped of his power and status when he is transformed into a blue bird by a wicked fairy. By virtue of his transformation, the king's body becomes vulnerable and he is subject to a number of painful and humiliating assaults. After suffering a near fatal attack on his life, the king begs his friend the enchanter to enclose him in a cage for the remaining five years of his curse:

> The royal bird […] begged his friend to take him home and to put him in a cage, where he would be safe from a cat's paw, or any murderous weapon. 'But,' said the enchanter, 'will you still remain five years in a condition so deplorable, and so little suited to your duties and your dignity? For, remember, you have enemies who assert that you are dead. They could seize your kingdom. I much fear you will lose it before you regain your proper form.' 'Can I not,' asked the king, 'enter my palace, and govern as I used to do?' 'Oh,' exclaimed his friend, 'the case is altered! Those who would obey a man, will not bow to a parrot: those who feared you while a king, surrounded by grandeur and pomp, would be the first to pluck out all your feathers, now you are a little bird.'[79]

As a result of his transformation into a bird, the loss of the king's power and status is complete. The vulnerability of his body necessitates that he give up any claim to power

[78] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 172.
[79] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 47.

that he once had. His humiliation is underscored by the enchanter's comment that those who once bowed before him would be inclined to pluck his feathers out now that he is a "little bird." The king's lament in response to this grim truth, " 'Alas, for human weakness!' cried the king. 'Although a brilliant exterior is as nothing compared to merit and virtue, it still possesses a power over the minds of men which it is difficult to combat,' "[80] could just as well serve as a description of the challenges that women faced in this period, undervalued by virtue of their feminine exteriors, no matter how much merit or virtue they may have possessed. It's therefore possible to identify a parallel here between the king's vulnerable position, and the position that so many women found themselves in at this time in France. Defined and restricted by their bodies, they were also seen as unfit to rule or command any real power because their bodies were imagined to be fragile and weak. The fact that the king must be kept in a cage for his own protection is also reminiscent of how women were often confined (in particular in convents) to protect them from threats of violence.

The altered state of the king's body, respected by no one and at risk of attack from all sides, means that even in his cage he is subject to life-threatening mishaps at every turn. The narrator recounts, not without humor, the various perils "his feathered majesty" must undergo while living as a bird, including being scratched by a cat when his cage falls off its hook, being throttled by a roguish monkey, and almost dying of thirst because they forget to provide him with fresh water. In short, he is completely at the mercy of his environment. The extremity of the king's situation creates a humorous effect; however, it also underscores the vulnerability of what it is to be alive. By exaggerating the king's

[80] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 47.

vulnerability to such an extreme degree (in transforming him into one of the smallest and most physically delicate creatures), the king's transformation illustrates in stark terms the reality of what it means to have a body in the material world. By reminding us that no living being is immune from harm, this focus on embodiment extends a kind of radical empathy towards even the most potentially insignificant beings in the natural world. In this way, the king's transformation queers the scale that ranks the importance of living beings on earth, destabilizing entirely the hierarchy that dictates that the life of a king is more worthwhile than that of a bluebird.

Similar to the cross-species desire represented in *La Chatte Blanche*, this tale also illustrates the desire Charmant's lover Florine has for him while he is a bird, emphasizing the sensuality of the king's animal body. Charmant's existence as a bird seems only to increase his tenderness as a lover, as is evidenced by the following description, when another character who observes the lovers:

> …saw, by the light of the moon, the most beautiful bird in the world, who talked to the princess, caressed her with his claw, and pecked her gently with his bill. She overheard part of their conversation, and was exceedingly surprised; for the bird spoke like a lover, and the beautiful Florine answered him most tenderly.[81]

It's worth noting that the observer in this scene is another female character. This is significant because it means the sensual details of the king's bird body described here—his "small sweet voice", the way he caresses the princess with his claw and pecks her gently with his bill—represent him as an object of feminine desire in the same way the beautiful ram is characterized in "Le Mouton," reversing the gendered positioning of subject/object by making the male character the object of a desiring feminine gaze. The

[81] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 45.

fact that the object of desire is both a male character and an animal establishes a connection between men and nature that directly subverts the associations with women and nature articulated by Boileau and other misogynist writers of the period, and in turn, expands our conception of desire beyond the hierarchies that dictate that men must dominate women and the natural world.

What the above scene also illustrates is the importance of the king's hybrid identity for the success of this loving relationship; hybrid in the sense that he contains a mix of animal and human characteristics. He may have the body of a bird, but he is still capable of speaking "like a lover." [82] When Florine sees him transformed, she is at first "much alarmed at the appearance of so extraordinary a bird, who spoke with as much sense as if he had been a man, and yet in the small sweet voice of a nightingale"; however, she is eventually reassured by "the beauty of his plumage," as well as the "words he uttered," [83] and her desire for him flourishes during the two years they pass together while the king is a bird:

> Two years thus passed away without Florine once complaining of her captivity. How could she? She had the gratification of conversing all night with him she loved. Never were there made so many pretty speeches. Though the bird never saw any one, and passed the whole day in a hollow tree, they had a thousand new things to tell one another. The matter was inexhaustible. Their love and their wit furnished them with abundant subjects of conversation. [84]

Charmant's ability to speak, and the subsequent conversations the lovers share throughout their courtship, is an integral aspect of their relationship. Their conversations establish them as equals, dismantling the hierarchy that dictates that as an animal, the

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[82] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 45.
[83] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 39.
[84] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 42.

king should be incapable of reason. Instead, the human and the animal are combined within him, and the king's ability to speak and reason is as integral to the lovers' relationship as his sensual animal body. What's foregrounded in their relationship is the mutuality and care they express for one another, a mutuality that is stressed by the moral at the end of the tale, which informs the reader, "Better to be a bird of any hue—A raven, crow, an owl—I do protest, Than tie yourself for life to a partner to/ Who either scorns you, or whom you detest." [85] These remarks make clear that mutual desire is more important than either partner's physical appearance, stressing a dynamic and expansive view of love in which beauty and desire can exist in multiple, and shifting, forms.

The tale that perhaps best illustrates this shifting, multiple, and expansive view of identity and desire is d'Aulnoy's "L'oranger et l'abeille" ("The Orange Tree and the Bee"), which tells the story of Aimée, a princess lost at sea and shipwrecked on an island populated by man-eating ogres. When Aimée's cousin Aimé is shipwrecked on the same island years later, the two fall in love, and thanks to Aimée's cleverness and skill, they manage to escape the ogres and return to their kingdom to marry. Although the tale ends in the expected heterosexual marriage, gender and sexuality are queered in the story in various ways, made most visible in the story's scenes of transformation. In these scenes of metamorphosis, the subversive gender position that each character occupies in the story is made legible by virtue of the transformations the characters undergo. In this way, magic makes the queerness in the characters' dynamics more visible and perceptible to the reader by giving it concrete form.

[85] D'Aulnoy, *Fairy,* 56.

In this tale, Aimée bears strong associations with the natural world, evidenced by the fact that she is raised beyond the borders of civilization on a remote island populated by ogres (in her infancy she is nursed by a doe). However, Aimée's feminine association with nature is neither one of weakness and passivity, nor of uninhibited sexuality and lust as Boileau posed. Instead, Aimée's upbringing on the island has made her strong, clever, and active. She wears a tiger-skin tunic that she made herself, carries a bow and a quiver of arrows to hunt her own food, and roams the woods "like a second Diana" rescuing unfortunate souls who are shipwrecked on the beach.[86] The allusion to Diana emphasizes Aimée's skills as a huntress, but as a maiden goddess associated with chastity, the invocation here also stresses Aimée's self-determinacy in managing her sexual desires, which is underscored by the moral at the end of the tale that praises Aimée's "extrême sagesse" for not giving into passion's temptations while she is "seule au milieu des bois" with her true love.[87]

Aimée's control over her own desires is significant because it represents female sexuality as something that can exist without being all consuming—she is depicted neither as prudish and absent of sexual desire, nor as completely at the mercy of her body's demands. We can also see Aimée's strength and self-determinacy in the active role she takes in her relationship with Aimé—she rescues him from the beach after he is shipwrecked, comes up with and implements the plan that allows them to escape the ogres, and hunts to feed them on their journey. Her role as a hunter and protector shows that she is able to perform masculine characteristics as well as any man. However, her

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[86] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 248. Translation is mine.
[87] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 276.

successful performance of just as many feminine characteristics shows like Belle-Belle/Fortuné that gender is far more complex and nuanced than the gender binary dictates. What is suggested by this tale is a much more multi-faceted and dynamic understanding of gender, wherein masculine and feminine characteristics and actions are mixed in each individual.

Although the interchangeability of the lovers' gender roles is well established from the story's beginning, it is during the transformation scenes that the fluid and dynamic nature of gender in their relationship is most evident. These transformations allow the lovers to break free of the restrictive roles that usually dictate a heterosexual romantic partnership, while also challenging the boundaries that separate humans from plants and animals, queering the very idea of what it means to be human in the world of d'Aulnoy's stories. In each transformation, Aimée casts the spell, establishing her as the one who takes action and makes decisions in dangerous situations. Each time, she transforms herself into an active subject, and Aimé into an object—first turning Aimé into a boat, and herself into the old woman steering it, then herself into a dwarf, and the prince into a portrait, and finally, herself into a bee, and the prince into an orange tree. These transformations make the gender politics implicit in the rest of the story quite literal, as the prince can neither move nor speak in the first two transformations, and it is Aimée who tricks the ogres and leads them astray, first as an old woman, and then as a dwarf.

It's also worth pointing out that the prince becomes a portrait of Mélusine, a mythological character who is the daughter of a human father and a fairy mother, compelled by a curse to live as a serpent from the waist down every Saturday. Mélusine

is a figure of transformation and hybridity, who represents a mixture of the human and the animal, as well as the natural and the noble, since according to Jean d'Arras's 1393 romance, *Roman de Mélusine,* she is also the founding mother of the Lusignan family line. As Anne Duggan points out, "The figure of Melusine thus carries with it notions of animality or 'nature,' motherhood, as well as nobility."[88] By transforming the prince into a portrait of this powerful mythological symbol of motherhood and hybridity, d'Aulnoy establishes a lineage between her own shape-shifting characters and another human-animal figure that had power in both the human and the natural world, illustrating that the prince can still be powerful and also contain elements of animality, femininity, and non-humanity.

Similar to the other transformed male protagonists mentioned above, Aimé is made more vulnerable by his transformation into an orange tree, complicating the idea that masculinity can only be defined by strength, dominance, and invulnerability of the body. Since he cannot move, and Aimée can, he fears that Aimée will leave him. Aimé's fear that his lover will abandon him reverses the trope of the passive female lover who fears that her roving male partner will be unfaithful to her. In an effort to keep Aimée by his side, the orange tree describes the particular pleasures he may offer her: "You will find on my flowers a pleasing dew and a liquor that's sweeter than honey where you may nourish yourself. My leaves will serve as a bed of rest where you may have nothing to fear from the malice of spiders." [89] The prince's description of what he might offer by way of sensual pleasures is made up of details that are typically coded as feminine.

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[88] Duggan, "Nature and Culture," 153.

[89] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 357. Translation is mine.

Softness, sweetness, and the offer of rest, care, and nourishment are all traits associated with feminine sensuality. It's worth noting as well the associations often made between flowers and women's sexual organs. The fact that these traits here are given to the prince expands the category of masculinity to incorporate characteristics not traditionally associated with this gender. Similar to d'Aulnoy's erotic depiction of the beautiful ram in "Le Mouton," d'Aulnoy feminizes the masculine body here by transforming it into a flowering tree. She creates a masculine sensuality meant to be appealing to the female gaze that centers on a woman's point of view and emphasizes female pleasure. That the prince's form as an orange tree is appealing to women is confirmed by the attentions he receives from another princess in the story, who wants to take the orange tree and move it into her own garden. Like Aimée, this princess demonstrates self-determination and agency over her own desires; she knows what she wants and she acts accordingly to get it.

Just as the prince's transformed body, now a tree, renders him more vulnerable, Aimée, as a bee, gains greater freedom of movement from hers, as well as an improved ability to protect her lover as her body is now equipped with a stinger, demonstrating how magic gives physical form to Aimée's non-traditionally feminine qualities. D'Aulnoy's shape-shifting magical world also changes what it means to be a human, by giving this human character a new ability in her transformed body that in her human body would never be possible. When another princess dares to try and pick the orange tree's flowers, "the vigilant Bee came out buzzing from beneath the leaves where she had been keeping watch and stung the princess with such force that she thought she would faint."[90] As

[90] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 271. Translation is mine.

Seifert has observed about Aimée in this scene: "The text emphasizes her active role in the sexual relation even further by inverting the courtly love model whereby a knight pledges his fidelity and service to a lady. In 'L'oranger et l'abeille,' it is Aimée who reassures Aimé of her love and who defends him with chivalric-like prowess."[91] In the same way that d'Aulnoy subverts tropes about courtly love in her other tales (for example, the subversion of the amorous hunt in "La Biche au bois"), she gives the role of the chivalric knight to the heroine of the story instead of the hero, queering not only the tale's gender politics about also its genre in her playful perversion of an expected trope. In making the story's chivalric hero not just a woman, but an *insect*, d'Aulnoy once again upends the hierarchical order of humans and the natural world, placing the bee at the top of the ladder instead of the bottom. The parodic dimensions of this inversion are further exaggerated by the fact that the bee is one of the smallest living creatures. When the smallest being suddenly becomes the most powerful, we can see that the scale that judges inner worth based on physical appearance totally falls apart. The correlation of size with greatness is completely reversed, suggesting that the categories we use to make sense of the world are flexible and changeable.

Aimée's role as the defensive hero protecting her lover from the attentions of other women is made even more apparent when Linda (the other princess), frustrated by the persistent attacks from the jealous bee, decides to go to war for the orange tree's affections. Armoring herself "just like Jason when he captured the golden fleece," Linda takes the advice of one of her ladies in waiting who suggests that she "courageously take

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[91] Seifert, *Fairy,* 124.

the most beautiful flowers from this pretty tree."[92] Her ladies arm themselves as well, referring to the incident as the "War of Flies and Amazons."[93] This chivalric battle over the beloved is subversive because the genders have been flipped—the two women battle over the affections of the beautiful orange tree, who can do nothing to protect himself and suffers a wound by Linda's sword. This scene is an example of mock-epic, and is comically burlesque in the way it pokes fun at the chivalric battle, a subject that would have been familiar to d'Aulnoy's readers. This burlesquing imitation of an event that's represented as something very serious in older literature draws attention to the absurdity of this very patriarchal display of power, and critiques the idea that love can be won through acts of dominance and violence. Instead of successfully defeating her enemy, Linda ends up wounding her beloved. Linda's display of martial power fails not because she is a woman, but because love cannot result from ownership or possession of the beloved. Linda fails because she wants to take the orange tree for herself with no concern for its autonomy or desires.

Endowing the bee and the orange tree with human traits is another way d'Aulnoy depicts the hybridity of identity and successfully upends the hierarchy dictating the superiority of humans over animals, and rationality over embodiment. Both characters can still speak and reason, as well as display emotion. When Aimée becomes jealous of Linda's affection for the orange tree, the narrator tells us: "She cried then as much as a bee is capable of crying."[94] The prince, in turn, demonstrates his own grief through the yellowing of his leaves: "Several of the amorous Orange Tree's flowers were wet, and his

[92] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 271. Translation is mine.
[93] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 271. Translation is mine.
[94] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 271. Translation is mine.

displeasure at having distressed his princess was so acute that all his leaves turned yellow, some of his branches dried up, and he thought he was dying."[95] The exaggerated nature of the characters' emotions gives the scene a parodic dimension, and there is certainly an element of farce in the image of the crying bee and the orange tree's dramatically withered leaves. D'Aulnoy is poking fun at the lovers' excessive emotions. However, as in all of d'Aulnoy's parodic reversals, there is another layer at work here beyond the strictly parodic—there is a layer of sincerity to the scene, and we are introduced to the idea that humanity can exist even in the non-human. Life exists in creatures and objects that we tend to think of as lesser than human. By giving human traits to some of these non-human beings, d'Aulnoy's transformed characters illustrate that the same respect and courtesy that's extended to humans should be shown to all components of the natural world, no matter how inanimate we might perceive them to be.

The characters display their very human emotions through their newly transformed bodies, thereby mingling the animal and the human, as well as the emotional with the rational. When Linda wounds the prince, the girl is shocked to hear a cry from the orange tree and see blood issue from its severed branch. It is significant that the prince expresses his grief both through a cry—demonstrating his ability to speak, a rational capacity—and through the blood that flows from the wound—demonstrating the expressive capacity of his body. The fact that the orange tree can both speak, as well as cry and bleed, demonstrates that he is both embodied *and* rational in equal measure. This very physical manifestation of the character's suffering also makes apparent the importance of sensuality in d'Aulnoy's tales. The prince's grief is made real through the

[95] D'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 271. Translation is mine.

blood that flows from his branches—both to the other characters in the story, as well as to the reader. Through the use of magic d'Aulnoy takes what would otherwise be abstract and makes it concrete, visceral, and available to the senses.

The reversal of the characters' expected gender roles, in which Aimée exerts her own will and Aimé tenderly submits, continues in the most sexually charged moment in the text when the two characters come together in an act of physical union in their transformed shapes: "And then, she enclosed herself in one of his biggest flowers, as though it were a palace, and true tenderness, which finds resources everywhere, did not fail to find itself in this union."[96] What makes the sexual valences of this moment so apparent is not only the author's use of the word 'union' (the same word is used in French) to describe this act of copulation, but also, and most especially, the cultural associations bound up in the image of a bee pollinating a flower, which is one of the most well-known symbols of fertility and sexuality. This scene queers heterosexual sex by reversing the roles traditionally associated with the act of penetration, placing the woman in the active role, and her male lover in the role of passive recipient. So what we see is a queering not only of the traditional gender roles assigned within heterosexual partnerships, but a queering of the sex act itself, in which penetration does not need to be the exclusive domain of male partners, nor does it need to define the sex act. In this moment of union between the characters, the active role of the female bee also foregrounds female pleasure by emphasizing her initiation of the act. This emphasis on female pleasure, while not queer in and of itself, stresses the importance of equality and

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[96] d'Aulnoy, *Contes,* 358. Translation is mine. The original French reads: « En effet, elle s'enferma dans une des plus grosses fleurs, comme dans un palais; et la véritable tendresse, qui trouve des ressources partout, ne laissait pas d'avoir les siennes dans cette union. »

mutuality between the lovers, a point that is further underscored by the fact that while it may be the bee who enters the orange tree's flower, the petals of the blossom close around her when she does, suggesting that the orange tree is actively participating and engaged in the couple's physical union. Therefore, the sex act here is mutually constitutive rather than dominated by one partner, so that the binary construction of active/passive partner fails to adequately account for the complexity and mutuality of the exchange.

What we also see in this scene is an emphasis on the profound tenderness of their union, a quality that is not always foregrounded in depictions of heterosexual sex, and that we do not expect to see depicted with sincerity in a text with parodic elements. Similar to Guerrier's caring treatment of his transformed lover in *La Biche au bois,* the gesture of the orange tree folding its leaves gently around the bee is an image that disrupts our expectations of how gendered sexual dynamics are typically represented, while also disrupting the one-dimensional mocking tone we expect from burlesque and mock epic. Although the scene has burlesque and parodic dimensions, it is not *merely* comical and absurd, the tenderness in this moment adds a layer of sincerity to the lovers' coupling. It is in this moment of connection, in which the characters come together not in their *true* forms but as their transformed selves, that the queer nuances in their dynamic become visible. What we see in this scene, then, is an illustration of how d'Aulnoy uses magic in the tale to push past the boundaries of what we imagine is possible in an act of sexual union. She expands the category of what sex can be by imagining a completely new version of what it can look like. Instead of a sexual act founded on violence and domination, d'Aulnoy's depiction foregrounds tenderness and emphasizes the mutual

pleasure of both parties. By imagining a completely different sex act, d'Aulnoy can then change the sexual politics of the participants involved. She is able to do all of this through the magic that is so critical to the fairy tale genre.

In d'Aulnoy's tales, both men and women are subject to animal transformations, and while in these animalistic states, the male characters are often rendered more vulnerable due to the limitations on their animal bodies, while the female characters gain access to greater freedom. In making both men and women subject to these transformations, d'Aulnoy subverts the seventeenth-century patriarchal associations of women with the body and the natural world and men with the mind and the civilized world, while also demonstrating that the body (and more specifically the *animal* body) can be a means to greater autonomy and freedom for women. By transforming both male and female characters in her tales, and forcing them into a greater proximity with their bodies and the natural world, d'Aulnoy demonstrates the value and even the beauty in what in the natural world has often been considered bestial, sinful, and inferior. Both men *and* women in d'Aulnoy's stories experience rapturous desire by virtue of their magical transformations and the magical worlds they encounter, and sensuality and reason are depicted as equally important qualities in men and women.

What makes these transformations subversive then is that they allow the characters to expand beyond the limits of their own gender, as well as their own species. This expansive capacity is also what makes the transformations queer on the level of identity, in addition to sexuality and desire. When a character is transformed into an animal or other creature, their identity as a human expands to incorporate this new form

that their body has taken, with all its new capacities and vulnerabilities. At its core, this transformative capacity illustrates the failure of binary thinking to describe the world. The hierarchical relationships between various categories—men and women, humans and animals, mind and body, reason and the senses—are revealed to be not only untrue, but also severely limiting. D'Aulnoy's stories illustrate the complexity of the interrelationships between categories understood to be binary, as well as the instability of these kinds of definitional categories.

Through the magical transformations of her characters, d'Aulnoy is able to subvert and re-imagine the restrictive gender norms that dominate patriarchal society. In this way, magic and queerness are intricately related in d'Aulnoy's tales. Without magic, the queer identities, couplings, and subversions that d'Aulnoy brings to life would not be visible to the reader. Magic takes what would otherwise exist only as an idea and gives it shape—makes it concrete and available to our senses. This emphasis on sensuality helps return us to an embodied way of thinking, which in turn stresses humanity's connection to the natural world. Through the animal transformations of her characters, and her use of lavish, sensual detail, d'Aulnoy illustrates how both men and women can be alternatively confined and liberated by their bodies, making clear that identities can be fluid, and that desire can exist in many forms.

D'Aulnoy's creative imagination helps expand our understanding of identity and desire beyond a binary either/or model, opening our eyes to a world in which all creatures and objects have a capacity for sentience and are equally deserving of our respect. Beauty has the capacity to exist everywhere in d'Aulnoy's magical worlds, and desire is not restricted by binary categories or heteronormative thought. By emphasizing the sensuous

properties of beings and objects in the material world and our various means of accessing those properties via our senses, d'Aulnoy directs our attention to the beauty of the material world and renders desire as something we can experience not just for romantic or sexual partners but for the entire world. Through her stories, we are given access to the beauty of the natural world and new ways of seeing our deeply embedded place within it. In the seventeenth-century language of the *précieuses,* d'Aulnoy offers a recalibration of the ideals of her time, depicting powerful women with agency over their own fates, and men who are gentle and receptive.

CHAPTER III

THE LIMINAL LANDSCAPE AND THE POET AS SUPERNATURAL MEDIUM IN JAMES MACPHERSON'S OSSIAN

> *Why openest thou afresh the spring of my grief, O son of Alpin, inquiring how Oscur fell? My eyes are blind with tears; but memory beams on my heart. How can I relate the mournful death of the head of the people! Prince of the warriors, Oscur, my son, shall I see thee no more!*
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> *He fell as the moon in a storm; as the sun from the midst of his course, when clouds rise from the waste of the waves, when the blackness of the storm inwraps the rocks of Aradnnider. I, like an ancient oak on Morven, I moulder alone in my place. The blast hath lopped my branches away; and I tremble at the wings of the north. Prince of the warriors, Oscur, my son! shall I see thee no more!*
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> -Book VII, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry,* James Macpherson

In the fall of 1759, in the town of Moffat in southern Scotland, the Reverend John Home first made the acquaintance of James Macpherson, a twenty-two-year old Highlander working as a private tutor to Graham of Balgowan.[1] Upon discovering that Macpherson shared his passion for Gaelic poetry, Home was delighted to learn that Macpherson had several such poems in his possession, and even more delighted when he found out that Macpherson was a Gaelic speaker himself. Home asked Macpherson to translate one of the poems for him, and after much persuasion, Macpherson agreed, returning in a day or two with what was to become "Fragment VII" in the volume of translations Macpherson would publish the following year, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*. Macpherson's publication of the *Fragments* met with such great success that Macpherson was encouraged by Home, and his friend Hugh Blair, to publish a further set of translations, resulting in the publication of two longer poems, *Fingal* in 1761, and

[1] Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, 77.

Temora in 1763, together with several shorter poems. The entire sequence of poems was published together in one volume in 1765 as *The Works of Ossian*.

Macpherson's poems were initially received with enthusiasm among members of Scottish literary circles who were eager for a distinctly Scottish literary tradition. Macpherson's evocative depiction of Celtic Scotland as a landscape of misty moors, howling ghosts, and lamenting bards influenced many of his contemporaries, as well as generations of English and Scottish writers who would come after him, including Thomas Gray, Ann Radcliffe, Sydney Owenson, Charles Maturin, William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Robert Burns, Alfred Tennyson, and Walter Scott (to name just a few).[2] The poems were translated into French, German, Dutch, and Italian within a few years after Macpherson's publication of the first *Fragments,*[3] had a profound effect on the development of European Romanticism, and were beloved by such eminent literary figures as Goethe, Herder, and Chateaubriand.[4]

Macpherson's poems purport to be translations of the poetic works of a blind, third-century bard by the name of Ossian, a figure who has a long and manifold existence in Celtic myth and legend, both in Ireland and Scotland.[5] Ossian, the last living member

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[2] The list of those influenced by Macpherson's work is of course not limited to literary figures; among the most notable non-literary figures to be inspired by Macpherson's project are Thomas Jefferson and Napoleon Bonaparte, who purportedly carried a copy of *The Poems of Ossian* with him into battle. (See James Porter, "'Bring Me the Head of James Macpherson': *The Execution of Ossian and the Wellsprings of Folkloristic Discourse*", p. 396)

[3] The first French translation of one of the *Fragments* appeared as early as 1760, followed by more in 1761; the first Dutch and German translations appeared in 1762, Italian in 1763, and into Swedish in 1765. For a complete list of translations of Ossian in Europe, see Paul Barnaby's "Timeline: European Reception of Ossian" in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe,* ed. Howard Gaskill, Thoemmes, 2004.

[4] For an excellent study on Macpherson's influence on Romanticism in Europe, see Paul Van Tieghem's *Ossian en France,* (1917) 2 vols. Paris: Rieder, & his essay "Ossian et l'ossianisme" in *Le préomantisme,* (1924-30) 3 vols. 1:195-285. Paris: Rieder.

[5] See Joseph Falaky Nagy's *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: The Boyhood Deeds of Finn in Gaelic Narrative Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 1-16.

of a band of Celtic warriors, is the narrator of the majority of the poems that comprise *The Works of Ossian*, and many of the poems ruminate on themes of memory, elegy, and loss. Most of Ossian's conversations are with his own memories, or with the many ghosts of his dead loved ones, who drift in and out of the poems, riding on scraps of cloud and mist. The poems are stylistically evocative of the type of poetry that would later come to dominate the Romantic tradition in Europe in their association of primitive or pastoral landscapes with the cultivation of intense emotion—especially feelings of sentiment and nostalgia. This nostalgia for a lost Highland literary culture manifests in the poems' many ghosts, which act as symbols of ritualized mourning for what eighteenth-century Scots had lost due to the destruction and suppression of Highland culture by the English. Macpherson uses the character of Ossian to represent his view of the idealized oral tradition of the bard that he wanted to both celebrate and preserve.

Like d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, Macpherson's poems are hybrid texts in the way they combine the oral with the literary, and also in the way they articulate both collective and individual notions of authorship. Macpherson's transposition of oral Gaelic poetry into print is similar to d'Aulnoy's use of oral folkloric sources in her tale-writing; both authors also recreate an oral situation *within* the context of their written work by structuring the events around a single speaker or narrator-like figure. While d'Aulnoy achieves this by structuring her tales within a frame narrative recounted by a storyteller who often speaks to the audience, thus evoking the salon setting from which the tales emerged, Macpherson situates his poems around the bard Ossian, establishing Ossian as the central speaker of the poems who serves as the reader's connection to the lost poetic world Macpherson conjures for the reader. This allows Macpherson to articulate an

individual and collective conception of authorship simultaneously, as the voices of the dead speak through Ossian.

The co-existence of these two seemingly opposing notions of authorship speaks not only to the poems' hybrid qualities, but also their liminality, or their existence in between different definitional categories. Liminality, a term first used by cultural anthropologists to refer to the transitional stages in a person's life, describes the experience of being on a boundary or a threshold, as being in between various states of being.[6] The poems demonstrate their liminality on a structural level, but also within the poems themselves in their depiction of the supernatural. Like the transformations in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, in which animal bodies take on human sentiments and emotions, Macpherson's depiction of the living natural landscape of the Highlands and its dynamic connection with the human characters in his poems showcases a fluid boundary between humans and nature that is evidence of a transformative and continually shifting physical world; in other words, a liminal world where boundaries and thresholds are constantly transgressed. Although there are no fairies, enchanters, or magic wands in Macpherson's poetic universe, the same kind of transformational logic that makes it possible for a human to turn into a cat or a tree in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales exists in the supernatural universe of Macpherson's poems, in which spirits dwell in stones and mountains, in which ghosts manifest out of clouds and mist, and in which the bard and his harp possess the power to call up spirits and navigate between the realm of the living and the dead.

Liminality as a concept also has roots in shamanistic rituals, in which the shaman, or spirit guide is a liminal being who acts as a mediator between the human and the

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[6] Leerssen, "Ossianic Liminality," 3-7.

supernatural world, which has particular bearing on Ossian's role in the poems as a poetic conduit to the spirit world.[7] Through his evocation of Ossian as a shamanistic poet with access to an otherworldly realm of supernatural forces, and his representation of the ghosts that Ossian calls into being (which are liminal beings themselves), Macpherson expresses a queer poetic imaginary in which the boundaries that separate humans from nature, and the living from the dead, are permeable and fluid. The queerness that's expressed in Macpherson's poems does not explicitly relate to gender and sexuality the way it does in d'Aulnoy's stories, instead, what we see in *The Works of Ossian* is a queering or transgression of the material world itself in the way that the rules that govern reality and our material existence, do not apply to the figures in the poems. The queerness that's depicted in Macpherson's poems is concerned rather with ontology and identity. The poems are queer in the way they imagine fluid movement between life and the afterworld, between the categories of the material and the spiritual, in their depiction of non-linear time, and in their representation of human identity as something inseparable from the natural world. Finally, in their depiction of the expression of intense melancholy and grief, and the pleasure that can be derived from these excessive emotions, the poems also articulate a queer kind of pleasure in the indulgence of melancholy feelings.

Macpherson as a Liminal Figure

The ontological liminality and hybrid notion of authorship in *The Works of Ossian* parallel Macpherson's own liminal position at the intersection of conflicting cultural identities. In presenting a collection of Gaelic-language poems to an English-speaking

[7] Leerssen, "Liminality," 3.

audience, Macpherson was faced not only with the difficulty of translating between language and cultural traditions, but also with the difficulty of bringing an extensively developed oral tradition into a literary milieu. As Fiona Stafford notes in her Introduction to the 1996 edition of *The Poems of Ossian*, Macpherson's *Ossian* is:

> pre-eminently a text of the margins—not in the sense that it is peripheral to serious literary study, but because it inhabits the margins of contrasting oppositional cultures. For Macpherson's 'translations' involved acts of interpretation not only between Gaelic and English, but also between the oral culture of the depressed rural communities of the Scottish Highlands, and the prosperous urban centres of Lowland Britain, where the printed word was increasingly dominant.[8]

Like d'Aulnoy, Macpherson was a marginalized member of the broader literary community in which he hoped to gain recognition, but for his ethnicity, rather than his gender.

A native Gaelic speaker, Macpherson was born at Ruthven in the Highlands of Scotland in 1736, in the Gaelic-speaking area of rural Badenoch. Macpherson grew up during the last organized attempts of the Highlanders to break free of English control. The division between Highland and Lowland Scots was keenly felt in this period as Scotland lost its parliament to the Act of Union in 1707, an event which Lowland Scots did not feel persuaded enough to protest against. Just down the road from where Macpherson was born stood Ruthven Barracks, "an imposing fortress erected by the British army in the 1720s as part of the campaign to bring order to the Highlands after the 1715 Rising."[9] There were two significant Jacobite uprisings in 1715 and 1745, both soundly crushed by the English (in part due to lack of support from Lowland Scots). The

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[8] Stafford, "Introduction," viii.
[9] Stafford, "Introduction," vii.

Battle of Culloden, which took place in 1746, was the final confrontation of the Jacobite rising of 1745, in which the forces of Charles Edward Stuart were decisively defeated by the English, near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands. Macpherson was too young to take up arms at the time, but his uncle, the Clan Chief, Ewan Macpherson of Cluny, joined forces with the Jacobite army. Following the defeat, Ewan Macpherson's castle was razed, the local community was violently pillaged and destroyed by the victorious British army, and Ewan was forced to go into hiding for the following nine years.

Macpherson would have witnessed scenes of appalling violence during his early years, and seen his home and family under the constant threat of further oppression. The Battle of Culloden marked the beginning of the brutally systematic destruction of Highland life and culture through punishments and civil penalties that undermined the clan system of governance, the economy, and all aspects of Gaelic cultural identity and expression.[10] Over the next hundred years, sheep farmers from England and Lowland Scotland cleared the crofts of the people who lived there, using soldiers and police force when poverty, hunger, and deprivation were not enough to maintain control.[11] By the time Macpherson was a young man attending University in Aberdeen in the 1750s, Scotland was no longer a political threat, and Scots from both the Highlands and Lowlands turned to their dominating English rulers for cultural heritage. It is in the wake of this profound cultural suppression and loss that Macpherson began to publish his poems with the encouragement of John Home and Hugh Blair.

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[10] Stafford, "Introduction," x. "After 1746, the tartan plaid was banned, and no Highlander allowed to carry arms or play the bagpipes. The estates of prominent rebel chiefs (including Cluny) were forfeited to the Crown, while the ancient systems of ward-holding and heritable jurisdiction were abolished. Such measures were a more Draconian development from the earlier, relatively peaceful, attempts to open communication and transport networks in the Highlands, and to encourage the use of English rather than Gaelic."

[11] See John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (New York: Penguin, 1969)

Macpherson's initial translation, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, provided the circles of the Edinburgh literary elite with a distinctly Scottish literary tradition to claim as their own. With Macpherson's "discovery" of these " 'genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry,' "[12] Scotland could lay claim to a poetic tradition purportedly as ancient as that of Greece and Rome, and that could rival similar mid-eighteenth-century English claims for their own ancient and bardic poetic traditions, as proposed in Joseph Addison's ballad papers, Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (published in 1765), and demonstrated by the English interest in Homer in this period.[13] What's more, the elegiac tone that pervades the *Fragments* (and Macpherson's later *Ossian* poems), as well as the feeling of nostalgic longing for what has been destroyed, spoke directly to the destruction of Highland culture by the English.[14] The poems served to unite Highland and Lowland Scots. In supposedly transcribing poetry from ancient Gaelic, Macpherson was heralded as both the discoverer and preserver of a Scottish literary tradition imagined on the brink of extinction.

In spite of their immense popularity, however, Macpherson's poems were also the subject of a heated controversy. Within a few weeks of publication, doubts were raised about the authenticity of Macpherson's Gaelic source material. The question at the heart of the controversy was whether Macpherson had really translated ancient Gaelic poetry collected in the Scottish Highlands, or, whether he had "invented Ossian and the stories

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[12] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* iv.

[13] See Albert Friedman's *The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry.* (Chicago University Press, 1961), and McLane, Maureen N. and Laura M. Slatkin. "British Romantic Homer: Oral Tradition, 'Primitive Poetry' and the Emergence of Comparative Poetics in Britain, 1760-1830." *ELH.* Vol. 78, No. 3 (Fall 2011): 687-714.

[14] As Leith Davis has noted, Macpherson's work "provided a focus for Highland and Lowland cultural nationalism after the shattering defeat of the Highlanders at Culloden" (Davis 132).

of the Celtic heroes in order to dupe the English reading public."[15] One of the most outspoken critics in the Macpherson controversy was Samuel Johnson, who in 1773, traveled with his friend and biographer, James Boswell, to the Highlands of Scotland to search for remnants of the Gaelic literary culture that Macpherson's work claimed to give evidence of. Johnson published an account of his trip in 1775 as *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, which was followed by the publication of Boswell's account of the same trip ten years later in 1785. Johnson was skeptical about the authenticity of Macpherson's project from the beginning, but his trip to the Highlands with Boswell confirmed in his mind the fraudulent nature of Macpherson's project, when he discovered that the literary tradition of the Highlands lacked the manuscript history for ancient poetry that existed in England.[16]

Samuel Johnson's claim that the Ossianic 'translations' were fraudulent resulted in Macpherson's exclusion from the British literary canon and a prevailing opinion that he is a charlatan and a fraud. In the last thirty years, however, scholars like James Porter, Fiona Stafford, and Howard Gaskill have demonstrated that Johnson's criticism were unjustified, not only because of his prejudices against Highland culture, but also due to his complete ignorance of the Gaelic language, and his belief that sophisticated literary cultures could not exist without a manuscript history. Johnson's ignorance of and inability to understand the post-colonial context Macpherson was working within reflects broader English views of Highland culture and oral literature at the time. In order to

[15] Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, 2.

[16] For an excellent account on the Johnson controversy see Howard Gaskill's "Introduction" to *Ossian Revisited.* ed. Howard Gaskill. Edinburgh University Press, 1991; and Fiona Stafford's essay "Dr. Johnson and the Ruffian: New Evidence in the Dispute Between Samuel Johnson and James Macpherson." (1989), *Notes and Queries* 36:70-77.

understand Macpherson's project, we have to remember that Macpherson was not only struggling to translate between languages, he was also attempting to translate between an oral tradition and a print-dominated one, all the while negotiating a cultural and political gap between Highland Scotland and the colonial power that had tried to wipe it out of existence.

Macpherson's Sources: Collective Creativity and the Orality of the Bard

Although Macpherson's first publication was a collection of fragments, rather than a unified work from the voice of a single poet, Macpherson believed firmly in the existence of a more substantial lost poetic work, written by a Celtic Homer, detailing "the successful defeat of an invading army by Fingal and his band of heroes."[17] Macpherson reportedly believed that there were old men still living in the Highlands who could repeat this lost epic poem from memory, and so he set out in August of 1760 for the Highlands and Islands of northwest Scotland to collect as much poetry as he could, both from verse recitations, as well as manuscripts. Some thirty years later, the subsequent investigations into Macpherson's sources by the Highland Society of Scotland revealed that "although Macpherson had not produced close translations of individual poems, he had nevertheless drawn on the traditional tales collected in his tours, using certain recognizable characters, plots and episodes."[18] According to Fiona Stafford, Macpherson, like so many early

[17] Stafford, "Introduction," xiii.

[18] Stafford, "Introduction," xiii.
There is some evidence to suggest that Macpherson's 'Fingal' is based, at least in part, on the prose-tale 'The Battle of Ventry' (which also exists in a ballad version in the sixteenth-century manuscript the Book of the Dean of Lismore, compiled in Perthsire between 1512 and 1542). For a detailed discussion of the potential influence of this book of poems on Macpherson's work, see Donald E. Meek, "The Gaelic Ballads of Scotland: Creativity and Adaptation." *Ossian Revisited.* ed. Howard Gaskill. Edinburgh University Press, 1991.

collectors of folklore, seemed to regard his project as an act of "sympathetic restoration," as the reconstruction of the broken remains of great Celtic epics, rather than "as a painstaking translation of the miscellaneous mass" of the material he had collected.[19] In the words of Macpherson's friend Andrew Gallie, who aided him in his collecting, Macpherson's aim was to restore "a work of great merit to its original purity."[20] Thus, Macpherson viewed his project as an attempt to correct or fix what had been broken or destroyed, which explains the liberties he took in altering (or from his point of view—improving upon) his fragmented materials.

The controversy over the authenticity of Macpherson's source material and the accuracy of his translations resulted not only from lack of knowledge about the Gaelic language in his readers, but also, a misunderstanding of the poems' existence in oral tradition. Macpherson's conceptualization of Ossian as bard was based on his own experiences with the remaining bardic tradition in the Highlands.[21] Oral poetic traditions in Scotland were deeply connected to the figure of the bard, whose own position was bound up with the clan structure of the Highlands. As the clan system gradually degraded because of the English colonial presence, especially in the eighteenth century, the role of the bard diminished as well. However, music and poetry—especially orally performed poetry—remained a vital part of life in the Highlands into Macpherson's childhood.

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[19] Stafford, "Introduction," xiv.

[20] Stafford, "Introduction," xiv.

[21] Stafford, "The Sublime Savage," 13. According to Fiona Stafford: "Although the system of bardic patronage had largely died out by the eighteenth century, many Clan Chiefs were still attended by a bard who was responsible not only for the composition of poetry, but also for preserving the history of the Clan." According to Joep Leerssen: "The state of Gaelic letters in the mid-eighteenth century *Gaeltacht* was one of an obsolete but still-remembered 'high' literature and a living tradition of oral lyrical and narrative verse. In these popular *amhráin* we find many elements which are definitely remains of older, medieval literary practice" (Leerssen 12-13).

The other oral art form Macpherson would have experienced growing up in the Highlands was tale-telling, especially tales about Ossian and the other Fenian heroes.[22] Tale-telling was a foundational part of everyday life in the Highlands, evidenced by J.F. Campbell's four-volume collection of Gaelic stories, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1860-1862). Although Campbell collected his materials nearly a hundred years after Macpherson published his first fragments, Campbell's collection attests that the rich tradition of oral storytelling in the Highlands was still flourishing a hundred years later. Campbell's collection includes a number of tales about Ossian, Oscar, and other figures who show up in Macpherson's poems, as well as a firsthand account of a traditional ceilidh, in which tales of the Ossianic heroes are recounted with great emotion to an audience moved to laughter and tears. Both Campbell's account of his experiences collecting the tales in his volume, and the tales themselves, speak to the vibrant presence of folk belief and legend still in existence in oral versions in the Highlands well into the nineteenth century. [23]

In his use of oral sources, Macpherson's project creates a new kind of orality within a literary context. Macpherson uses Ossian as a figure within the poems to represent his idealized version of the oral poetic tradition of the Highlands. Like d'Aulnoy's literary tales that are influenced by oral tradition but do not reflect a pure representation of the orality of the folk, the orality in Macpherson's poems is not

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[22] "The common Gaelic inheritance of North West Scotland and Ireland meant that ballads and tales relating to Fionn, Oscar and Oisin were current throughout Inverness-shire, and it is easy to imagine James Macpherson as a child sitting at the hearth of his neighbor, the well-known story-teller Finlay Macpherson of Lyneberack" (Stafford, ix, "Introduction" *The Poems of Ossian*).

[23] Campbell describes the ongoing presence of the Ossianic heroes in the Scottish landscape in his introduction: "There are endless mountains bearing Ossianic names in all parts of Scotland, and even in the Isle of Man the same names are to be found mixed up with legends" (xxxiii).

necessarily the "pure" remains of a blind prophetic bard, but rather a combination of some manuscript sources, some actual performances of Gaelic poetry transcribed by Macpherson, and his own extensive authorial intervention. In stitching different texts together and adding his voice to existing creative works by adapting them significantly, Macpherson's project performs a collective kind of creativity.

This notion of collaborative creativity can be seen in the poems themselves, in the way that Ossian, although he is the narrator of the poems, acts as the voice for all of his people and therefore becomes a singular voice bespeaking the collective. As the last living member of his people, Ossian is responsible for keeping their songs and stories alive, and as the narrator of the poems, the many voices of his people speak through him. This can be seen in the way that the ghosts in the poem speak through Ossian, but also, in Ossian's memories of moments of collective song, as in the following scene from Book VI of *Fingal,* when Ossian describes a performance by Fingal's bard Ullin, given after a battle with the Scandinavian king Swaran:

> Raise, ye bards of other times, raise high the praise of heroes; that my soul may settle on their fame; and the mind of Swaran cease to be sad.
>
> They lay in the heath of Mora; the dark winds rustled over the heroes.
>
> —A hundred voices at once arose, a hundred harps were strung; they sung of other times, and the mighty chiefs of former years.[24]

In asking his bard Ullin to perform, Fingal describes how Ullin will necessarily invoke "ye bards of other times" to help him in his song, revealing that this one creative performance is built upon a long tradition of many others. The supernatural nature of the poem conjures this poetic reference into reality: as the "dark winds" rustle over the

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[24] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 102.

heroes, the poem signals that the ghosts of these former bards arrive to join the heroes on the heath. What might be understood in another poem as a simple poetic address to the muse, the poet's entreaty to the "bards of other times" becomes literal in the supernatural context of Macpherson's poem—where the boundary between this world and the next is effectively permeable—as the dead souls of the bards arrive on the heath, stringing their ghostly harps, and raising their voices in collective song. The collective nature of their performance is emphasized by the line: "A hundred voices at once arose; a hundred harps were strung," as the voices of the past bards join Ullin in his song. Time, in effect, collapses in this moment of ghostly invocation, so that the bards throughout the ages might come together and sing as a group, irrespective of when they were alive.

In this scene, Macpherson manages to evoke two different conceptions of authorship simultaneously as this moment of collective creativity (and thus, collective authorship) is complicated by Ossian's interjection that the moment he describes is past, and he is now alone, giving voice to the profound isolation of the poet even in the midst of his recollections. In the line immediately following the description of the ghostly chorus, Ossian interrupts his recounting of this occasion to lament that those that raised their voices in collective song are long since dead: "When now shall I hear the bard", Ossian says, "or rejoice at the fame of my fathers? The harp is not strung on Morven; nor the voice of music raised on Cona. Dead with the mighty is the bard; and fame is in the desart no more." [25] Even as he recalls this scene of collective song, Ossian laments his isolation as the sole living member of his people. But even if Ossian is alone as he recounts this memory, in doing so, he is giving voice to the multitudes that came before

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[25] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 102.

him, just as Macpherson is adding his singular authorial voice to the fragments of Gaelic poetry that have come down to him through the ages, having passed through many voices.

Queer Liminality and the Poet as Spiritual Medium

The entirety of Macpherson's Ossianic corpus includes his first publication, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, published in 1760, and *The Works of Ossian,* published in 1765, which is comprised of two longer epic poems: *Fingal,* containing six books; *Temora,* containing eight books; and a number of shorter poems and fragments. All of the poems are written in the same distinctive style developed by Macpherson, which is a rhythmic poetic prose likely inspired by the prose tales of Gaelic Scotland.[26] Macpherson arranged the poems in a scholarly format upon publication, with abundant footnotes explaining his choices as a translator, pointing out similarities in the poems with classical authors, commenting on Ossian's poetic merits, and explaining the beliefs and customs of Ossian and his people. For the epic poems, Macpherson includes a helpful "Argument" at the beginning of each book, summarizing its major events. These explanations are instrumental for understanding the poems because although they are written in prose, they move continually between narrative and lyric, and the writing is incredibly dense; changes in location happen without explanation, and characters often speak with no introduction from the poet. The amount of supplementary material accompanying the poems is extensive; indeed, for many of the poems, Macpherson's commentary is almost equal in length to the poems themselves. In this we can once again observe Macpherson's

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[26] Meek, "The Gaelic Ballads of Scotland," 41.

own liminal position in regard to the poems, as he simultaneously occupies the role of poet, translator, critic, and editor.

The two epic poems are the most distinctly narrative, relating the actions of battles fought between the Scottish warrior, Fingal (Ossian's father), and various enemies. *Fingal*, tells the story of Fingal coming to the aid of the Irish chief, Cuchullin, in a battle against the forces of Swaran, king of Lochlin (Scandinavia), who has invaded Ireland.[27] In spite of the warning he receives from the ghost of one of his fallen warriors, Cuchullin continues to engage with the Scandinavian troops and suffers a humiliating defeat. The tide of the battle is turned by Fingal's arrival and it is ultimately thanks to the presence of him and his men that Swaran is defeated and driven back to Scandinavia. *Temora,* which Macpherson published in full in 1763 (the first book of the poem had been published along with several shorter poems in the first edition of *Fingal* in 1761), details yet another occasion when Fingal's troops come to the rescue of the Irish, this time against the forces of the *Firbolg,* a "nation" from Britain, as Macpherson describes them in his prefatory remarks, and their chief Cairbar, who murders Cormac, the Irish king. Once again, it is thanks to Fingal and his mighty warriors (including his sons, Ossian, and Fillan—who is killed in battle) that the usurping king is defeated, and the kingdom is restored to its lawful Irish prince. Several sections of the poem also relate the initial conflict between Firbolg and Cormac's predecessor, Conar, which took place in the time of Fingal's grandfather, Trathal. In the twenty or so shorter poems that accompany the two epics in *The Works of Ossian*, the style and subject of the poems are much the

[27] Scholars have now demonstrated that the events in this poem are likely based on ballads found in a 16th century Scottish ballad manuscript, The Book of the Dean of Lismore. See Meek, "The Gaelic Ballads of Scotland," 40.

same. Other exploits of Fingal and his sons are related by a poetic voice, usually Ossian, who at times refers to himself in the third person like the other characters in the poem, and at other times, speaks in the first person, from a much later time, to interject his feelings of sorrow that he is the last living member of his people.

What is consistent throughout all of Macpherson's Ossianic poetry is the pervasive mood of melancholy and the elegiac tone that clearly identities the poems as memorials to Ossian's fallen friends and warriors.[28] Nearly every poem in the corpus describes someone's death, and the deaths of certain figures are the subject of multiple poems, such as Ossian's son, Oscar; Oscar's lover Malvina, the lovers Vinleva and Shilric, and Ossian's wife, Evirallin. But more than the subject of death, it is the tone that marks the writing as elegiac, in which the focus is on the loss experienced by those who knew the deceased, and on the *feelings* of grief they experience. In addition to a focus on the emotions of the characters in the poems, Macpherson also evokes an elegiac mood through his depiction of the supernatural world of the Highlands—through the figure of the bard who acts as an intermediary with the supernatural, and through the ghosts that populate the poems and are comprised of elements of the natural world. The blurring between the natural and the supernatural world through Macpherson's descriptions of the ghosts, as well as the human characters in the poem (who are described almost

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[28] Macpherson himself comments on this on several occasions in his notes, giving various explanations for why this was the case. One explanation he offers is the following: "Dark images suited the melancholy temper of his mind. His poems were all composed after the active part of his life was over, when he was blind, and had survived all the companions of his youth: we therefore find a veil of melancholy thrown over the whole" (Macpherson 511). In another instance, he writes of Ossian: "If ever he composed any thing of a merry turn it is long since lost. The serious and melancholy make the most lasting impressions on the human mind, and bid fairest for being transmitted from generation to generation. Melancholy is so much the companion of a great genius, that it is difficult to separate the idea of levity from chearfulness, which is sometimes the mark of an amiable disposition, but never the characteristic of elevated parts" (Macpherson 472).

exclusively in relation to the natural world) is evidence of the poem's ontological liminality. Therefore, the liminality that's expressed through the poems on a formal level can also be seen in the supernatural content of the poems.

Macpherson's poetic associations between humans and nature suggest that there is no distinction between the humans in the poem and the natural world around them. When Ossian describes Cuchullin's warriors as a grove of trees "through which the flame had rushed, hurried on by the winds of the stormy night; distant, withered, dark, they stand, with not a leaf to shake in the vale," [29] it is not merely figurative language being employed, but evidence of a system of belief that did not see such a strict separation between humans and the natural world. We can see this close proximity between humans and the natural world expressed in the language used to describe the heroes in the poem, particularly during instances of heightened emotion, as in this selection from Fragment VII of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, which describes Ossian mourning the death of his son, Oscar:

> He fell as the moon in a storm; as the sun from the midst of his course, when clouds rise from the waste of the waves, when the blackness of the storm inwraps the rocks of Ardannider. I, like an ancient oak on Morven, I moulder alone in my place. The blast hath lopped my branches away; and I tremble at the wings of the north. Prince of the warriors, Oscur my son! shall I see thee no more! [30]

Here, Ossian recalls the death of his son Oscar in an act of elegiac mourning, expressing his grief, while also memorializing Oscar's skill as a warrior. Oscar's death is made glorious through Ossian's comparisons with the sun and the moon, and Ossian's grief is represented through his association with the oak tree. Ossian is like the oak tree because

[29] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 68.
[30] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 16.

it, like he, is ancient and alone, solitary in a barren landscape without others of its kind. His grief is so profound that he moves from an analogy with the oak tree to a complete transformation into it. In the second line, there is no preposition of comparison, no "like" or "as" to separate Ossian from the tree; he has become the tree. "The blast hath lopped *my* branches away", Ossian says; "*I* tremble at the wings of the north." [31] In this transformative leap of language, we see the boundary between Ossian and the natural landscape that surrounds him dissolve completely—until he is the tree and speaks with its voice.

We can see evidence of this same kind of transformative logic in another description from a battle in *Fingal*, when Cuchullin, the leader of the Irish, meets with Swaran, the king of the Scandinavians:

> Still Swaran advanced, as a stream that bursts from the desart. The little hills are rolled in its course; and the rocks half-sunk by its side. But Cuchullin stood before him like a hill, that catches the clouds of heaven. —The winds content on its head of pines; and the hail rattles on its rocks. But, firm in its strength, it stands and shades the silent vale of Cona.
>
> So Cuchullin shaded the sons of Erin, and stood in the midst of thousands. Blood rises like fount of a rock, from panting heroes around him. But Erin falls on either wing like snow in the day of the sun. [32]

This example shows how the images of the natural world take on a life of their own, so that when Cuchullin is described as a hill, it isn't just a passing comparison, but almost as if Cuchullin actually transforms into a hill, as the next sentence relates more details about it; how it's covered with pines, how hail falls on it and rattles its rocks, but still it "stands and shades the silent vale of Cona." [33] The same is true of the description of Swaran, who

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[31] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 16.
[32] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 68.
[33] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 68.

is likened to a stream—we learn of the hills "rolled in its course" and the rocks "half-sunk" alongside it, so that instead of a battle between two human heroes, we are treated to a description of a battle between the forces of the natural world, between a mighty stream that overflows its course, and the hill that it surrounds. The final image of the men of Ireland melting like snow on a sunny day as they succumb to the Scandinavian troops again transforms our experience of the events of the poem into a landscape that is entirely absent of human figures.

The poems are full of comparisons like these; nearly every description of a human character contains some association with the natural world. The following example from the second book of *Fingal* shows the range and versatility of these comparisons, and how tightly they are often layered on top of each other in the space of just a few lines. Here, the poet describes the approach of the Scandinavian army, comparing them first to birds, then ghosts, then streams, their king to a stag, and his shield to a flame:

> They rose like a flock of sea-fowl when the waves expel them from the shore. Their sound was like a thousand streams that meet in Cona's vale, when after a stormy night, they turn their dark eddies beneath the pale light of the morning.
>
> As the dark shades of autumn fly over the hills of grass; so gloomy, dark, successive came the chiefs of Lochlin's echoing woods. Tall as the stag of Morven moved on the king of groves. His shining shield is on his side like a flame on the heath at night, when the world is silent and dark, and the traveller sees some ghost sporting in the beam. [34]

The dizzying speed with which the poet leaps from metaphor to metaphor can often make it hard to keep track of what in the poem is "real" and what is merely an elaboration of the poet's figurative language. One could suggest that this is simply evidence of bad writing—overwrought, and overdone, in which the poet mixes too many metaphors.

[34] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 66.

However, aside from the issue of whether this is good or bad writing, what this use of metaphor suggests is an ontology of shape-shifting and liminality, in which the poet, through his use of figurative language, transforms the characters in the poem from their human shapes to those of animals and elements of the natural world. Although these transformations are not *literal* like the transformations of humans into animals and plants in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, nor are they *magical* in the same sense, they still contain evidence of a belief system with its roots in the Celtic world Macpherson is evoking in his poems, in which it was thought the soul of a man could take up residence in a tree, or a cloud of rain; in which one form could transform into another. While d'Aulnoy's transformations may be literal and the majority of Macpherson's are figurative (although we will see evidence of literal transformations when we look at how ghosts are represented in the poems), the effect is the same: both eliminate the boundary that separates humans from the natural world. In doing so, they enact a queer imaginary that establishes equality between humans and nature, and in which fluidity is the defining characteristic of the material world.

This understanding of the world as essentially fluid and dynamic, illustrated by the supernatural universe in both Macpherson's poems and d'Aulnoy's stories, and what I refer to as an ontology of liminality—is a central component of early Celtic mythology and can be seen in many early Gaelic texts such as the *Tír na nÓg, Fionn MacCumhail, Na Fianna, The Aos Sí/Aes Sídhe, The Tuatha Dé Danann*, as well as the eighth-century Irish epic, the *Táin Bó Cuailnge.* This liminal ontological belief system is responsible for the abundance of shape-shifting in these texts because in it, material reality is understood to have a transformative capacity. Instances of physical transformation are an integral

part of the *Táin*'s poetic universe—it begins with a story of two battling magicians who transform into a variety of different animals and creatures to prove whose magic is more powerful, and the poem is filled with references to magical transformations, whether it's the transformations of the Morrígan, or Cúchulainn's transformations into a grotesque fighting monster. This same shifting and liminal ontology shapes the world Ossian inhabits as well, in which everything in the poems—the landscape, the characters, and especially the ghosts—is constantly on the brink of dissolving into mist.

The *Táin* is a helpful text for understanding the world Macpherson's poems were trying to depict—it gives us an idea of how the supernatural was understood in early Gaelic literature, and also, a view of how poetry functions in a purely oral context. Indeed, the opening conceit of the *Táin* provides a version of the very problem Macpherson struggled with as a poet working from an oral tradition: the poets of Ireland have come together to try and recall the 'Táin Bó Cuailnge' in its entirety, but even with their joint efforts, they cannot remember the whole poem (having no written record of it). They send one of their pupils, Muirgen, to find a complete version of the poem beyond Ireland's shores. Before he leaves the country, Muirgen comes upon the grave of Fergus, one of the heroes from the *Táin,* and Muirgen chants a "poem to the gravestone as though it were Fergus himself,"[35] telling the rock if only it were Fergus, they could recover the poem. At the conclusion of Muirgen's chant:

> A great mist suddenly formed around him—for the space of three days and nights he could not be found. And the figure of Fergus approached him in fierce majesty, with a head of brown hair, in a green cloak and red-embroidered hooded tunic, with gold-hilted sword and bronze blunt sandals. Fergus recited him the whole Táin, how everything had happened, from start to finish.[36]

[35] Kinsella, *Táin,* 1.
[36] Kinsella, *Táin,* 1.

There are several ways in which this scene resonates with the core themes of *The Poems of Ossian*. The first is that ghosts serve as sources of poetic inspiration, as they represent a link to the past that the poet is attempting to memorialize or put into song. Furthermore, Muirgen's speech to the gravestone is illustrative of the same connection between humans and the natural world seen in Macpherson's poetry, in which by a kind of associative magic, the physical remains of Fergus still contain some trace of his spirit or soul, which can be called into being by direct poetic address. Finally, the very life-like, vivid, and material quality of Fergus's ghost (rendered in the description of the vibrant colors of his sandals, clothing, and sword, and his "head of brown hair"), combined with the obfuscating cloud of mist he appears in, bears similarities with the pseudo-corporeal forms of the ghosts that show up throughout *The Works of Ossian* (as we shall see in more detail below). Fergus's ghost, like the ghosts in *Ossian*, is both ethereal and corporeal at once, simultaneously a spiritual being and a corporeal one, and is thus, the ultimate figure of liminality, as well as a ghostly symbol of orality, elegy, and poetic inspiration, and a visceral connection both to the past, and the natural world.

The link between poetry, the natural landscape, and the memory of the dead is an important one throughout *The Works of Ossian*, and in a poem titled "Colna-Dona," we see the foundation being laid for the very scene that takes place in the *Táin* when Fergus' ghost is conjured from his gravestone. Fingal dispatches Ossian and Toscar (another of his warriors) to erect a memorial stone on the banks of the stream Crona, to commemorate their victory there. Accompanied by the music of three performing bards, Ossian tells how he takes a stone from the stream, still "curdled" with the "blood of Fingal's foes", and after Toscar lays a dagger and some mail in the earth, they "raised the

mould around the stone, and bade it speak to other years."[37] Then comes a moment of apostrophic address, typical in Ossian's poems, in which Ossian speaks directly to the stone, as though it were a living entity capable of both listening and speaking:

> Oozy daughter of streams, that now art reared on high, speak to the feeble, O stone, after Selma's race have failed!—Prone, from the stormy night, the traveler shall lay him, by thy side: thy whistling moss shall sound in his dreams; the years that were past shall return. –Battles rise before him, blue-shielded kings descend to war: the darkened moon looks from heaven, on the troubled field. –He shall burst, with morning, from dreams, and see the tombs of warriors round. He shall ask about the stone, and the aged will reply, 'This grey stone was raised by Ossian, a chief of other years!" [38]

Ossian's direct address to the stone not only bestows a kind of personhood upon it, it also suggests that through his powers as a bard he is able to endow the stone with magic that will enable the stone to convey to future generations the happenings of former years by conjuring up images of the dead in their dreams. Thus, the stone is able to "speak to the feeble" thanks to the magical intervention of the bard, who makes material this otherwise figurative power by giving the stone the ability to communicate through its "whistling moss." [39] In this way, the symbolic powers of representation that the memorial stone possesses become literal in the magical universe of Macpherson's poem, thanks to the intervention of the bard. This scene is illustrative of the important role the bard plays in the supernatural universe of the poems, as well as how the natural world is bound up with the supernatural, both in the way that objects in the natural world are depicted as possessing spirits, or souls of their own, and also, in the way that human spirits, in the form of ghosts, take shape through aspects of the natural world.

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[37] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 326.
[38] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 327.
[39] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 327.

In *The Works of Ossian*, ghosts offer a bridge between different planes of existence. The most obvious divide they are able to bridge is between the realm of the living and the dead as they pass back and forth between these two realms frequently, sometimes in order to deliver messages or warnings to their still living friends, sometimes to offer moral support,[40] and other times, as Macpherson explains in his footnotes, they simply return to the places that they loved most in life.[41] Ghosts also mediate between the human and the animal worlds, as Macpherson tells us in one footnote, the dogs and horses of the deceased were able to perceive their presence when they returned as ghosts,[42] and in another, that deer also saw the ghosts of the dead.[43] The appeal of this notion (of being able to speak with and be comforted by the dead) both to Macpherson, and especially his Scottish readers, takes on additional significance in the wake of the immense loss experienced by Highlanders in the eighteenth-century.

Just as Macpherson's descriptions of the living human characters rely on comparisons with the landscape they inhabit, so too are the ghosts brought to life via their relation to the natural world. However, unlike the humans' natural associations, which remain purely figurative, the ghosts are represented as being *literally* comprised of

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[40] From Book I of *Fingal*: "Peace, said Cuchullin, to the souls of the heroes; their deeds were great in danger. Let them ride around me on clouds; and shew their features of war: that my soul may be strong in danger; my arm like the thunder of heaven" (58). Macpherson's accompanying footnote to this passage explains: "It was the opinion then, as indeed it is to this day, of some of the highlanders, that the souls of the deceased hovered round their living friends; and sometimes appeared to them when they were about to enter on any great undertaking" (422).

[41] From Macpherson's footnote in Book I of *Fingal,* regarding the death of Trenar: "It was the opinion of the times, that the souls of heroes went immediately after death to the hills of their country, and the scenes they frequented the most happy time of their life. It was thought too that dogs and horses saw the ghosts of the deceased" (423).

[42] See previous note.

[43] From a note in the poem "Carthon": "It was the opinion of the times, that deer saw the ghosts of the dead. To this day, when beasts suddenly start without any apparent cause, the vulgar think that they see the spirits of the deceased" (Macpherson 445).

elements of the natural world, and the ghosts, far from being metaphorical, are as real as the poems' human heroes. Ghosts throughout *The Poems of Ossian* ride on clouds and meteors, and their voices merge with the wind. Macpherson tells us in a footnote in Book Three of *Fingal* that: "the ghosts of deceased warriors […] were supposed in those times to rule the storms, and to transport themselves in a gust of wind from one country to another."[44] The ghosts' connection to wind and storms demonstrates their ongoing presence in the natural world. We see this in Book Four of *Fingal* when Fingal is visited by the ghost of Agandecca while sleeping:

> The hero had seen in his rest the mournful form of Agandecca; she came from the way of the ocean, and slowly, lonely, moved over Lena. Her face was pale like the mist of Cromla; and dark were the tears of her cheek. She often raised her dim hand from her robe; her robe which was of the clouds of the desart: she raised her dim hand over Fingal, and turned away her silent eyes.
>
> Why weeps the daughter of Starno, said Fingal, with a sigh? Why is thy face so pale, thou daughter of the clouds?—She departed on the wind of Lena; and left him in the midst of the night.[45]

Not only is Agandecca's ghost compared to mist, but she is also comprised of elements of the natural world, as Ossian tells us her robe was made of clouds. The fact that the ghosts can take on elements of the physical landscape is evocative of Macpherson's nature-filled descriptions of the humans in the poem, demonstrating that both living and dead characters share a dynamic and interactive relationship with the natural world. The ghosts' connection to the natural world is further evidence of the equality established in the poem between humans and nature, showing that they are not only equal but interchangeable. The fluid movement between these categories gestures to the same

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[44] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 428.
[45] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 84.

transformative logic that challenges the concept of a stable identity in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, except here instead of humans turning into animals and back again, the spirits of the dead become clouds and mist and wind, their spirits taking on a material aspect as they blend with the elements of the natural world, queering the divide between humans and nature, as well as between the living and the dead.

Just as Agandecca's ghost is referred to by Fingal as a "daughter of the clouds," ghosts are also referred to as "sons of the wind."[46] The association with ghosts and wind appears in Book Three of *Fingal* when Cuchullin speaks to the ghosts of his fallen warriors: "O spirits of the lately-dead, meet Cuchullin on his heath. Converse with him on the wind, when the rustling tree of Tura's cave resounds."[47] Here, the ghosts' voices appear to be indistinguishable from the wind, and when Cuchullin mentions "the rustling tree of Tura's cave" resounding with the sound, it's not clear whether the force that causes the leaves to rustle is in fact the wind, or the rustling voices of the dead. In this image, the two things are understood to be one and the same. Through this connection with the natural world, the ghosts' voices take on a material presence that can cause a tree to rustle, or a cave to resound with its force. This association between ghosts and the natural world thus also establishes a connection between the material and immaterial realms, as ghosts, or spirits, are entities associated with the non-physical plane. However, in the world of Macpherson's poems, ghosts are decidedly more than just spiritual entities—they have a physical presence, illustrated not only through their associations

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[46] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 84.
[47] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 76.

with the natural world but also in the various functions they serve throughout the poems, and in the dynamic ways they engage with the material world around them.

This blurring of the distinction between the material and the immaterial (or the physical and the spiritual) demonstrates a similar disregard for hard categories and boundaries that we saw in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales. Instead, fluidity and liminality are the principles that govern the supernatural universe of Macpherson's poems, expanding our conception of what it means to a be a human and have a body in the world. We can see the various ways Macpherson's ghosts defy any kind of strict material/spiritual separation by looking at another example of a ghostly visitation in Book Two of *Fingal*, when the ghost of Crugal (one of the Irish heroes slain in battle) visits Connal on the eve of battle to warn him of Cuchullain's impending defeat, arriving on "a dark-red stream of fire coming down from the hill." [48] In a helpful footnote, Macpherson explains that the ghost is depicted here riding on the back of a meteor, which, according to Macpherson, is yet another way ghosts were thought to travel. Crugal's ghost is comprised of various elements of the surrounding landscape, his face "like the beam of the setting moon," his robes "of the clouds of the hill." [49] Yet, in addition to these ethereal characteristics, a clear trace from his physical body remains. We learn that his body still bears the wound that caused his death as the poet tells us: "Dark is the wound on his breast;" and later, that he stood: "Dim, and in tears." [50] The presence of the wound on his body and the tears he sheds suggest some level of corporeality, challenging the notion that ghosts are purely spiritual entities. We can see from these details, as well as the description that follows, an

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[48] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 65.
[49] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 65.
[50] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 65.

account of a creature that is neither entirely living nor dead, neither wholly of the material world, nor wholly of the spiritual, emphasizing once again the liminal quality of these figures in the poem.

The ghost also describes himself using details from the landscape to give definition to his form. "I am light as the blast of Cromla," he says, "and I move like the shadow of mist." [51] Even though the ghost describes himself in these ethereal terms, he clearly has some physical form as he can speak with and be seen by Connal who makes note of the ghost's insubstantial but decidedly material presence when he later describes the visitation to Cuchullin, saying of the ghost: "The stars dim-twinkled through his form; and his voice was like the sound of a distant stream." [52] Connal's mention of the stars twinkling through Crugal's ghostly body makes clear that though visible, his form is insubstantial; and his description of the sound of his voice establishes that though his voice can be heard, it possesses a similarly immaterial quality as his physical form, audible, yet distant. Macpherson himself comments on the nature of the ghost's materiality in a footnote to this scene:

> The poet teaches us the opinions that prevailed in his time concerning the state of separate souls. From Connal's expression, 'That the stars dim-twinkled through the form of Crugal,' and Cuchullin's reply, we may gather that they both thought the soul was material; something like the ειδωλον [AY-doh-lon] of the ancient Greeks. [53]

Macpherson's commentary on this matter shows us that he was aware of the paradoxical nature of the ghost's present/absent status—that although it is a spirit (or soul as Macpherson refers to it here) this spirit has a material quality that can be perceived by

[51] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 65.
[52] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 65.
[53] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 426.

human senses. By complicating the notion that there is a strict divide between our bodies and our spirits, the poems present a view of spirituality that suggests a unity between body and soul that is absent from many of the dominant religious traditions that gained traction in the European world in the time the poems were published. By suggesting the interchangeability of these two categories, this hybrid notion of the material/spiritual establishes equality between them, showing that our corporeal reality is just as valid as our mental one, and vice versa. This vision of material/spiritual integration suggests a wholeness of personhood that is absent from understandings of human subjectivity as split, or fundamentally divided.

The ghosts' pseudo-materiality is related to another aspect of the afterlife as it's represented in Macpherson's poems, which is as place of pleasure where, according to Macpherson, the deceased "were supposed to pursue, after death, the pleasures and employments of their former life. The situation of Ossian's heroes, in their separate state, if not entirely happy, is more agreeable, than the notions of the ancient Greeks concerning their departed heroes."[54] We see a glimpse of "the airy halls" where the dead go to dwell in the poem, "Berrathon," which Macpherson describes as the last poem Ossian wrote before his death, and which tells of his departure from the land of the living into the realm of the dead. In the following passage, Ossian describes the kingdom of his dead ancestors in the clouds:

> But thou risest like the beams of the east, among the spirits of thy friends, where they sit in their stormy halls, the chambers of the thunder. —A cloud hovers over Cona: its blue curling sides are high. The winds are beneath it, with their wings, within it is the dwelling of Fingal. There the hero sits in darkness; his airy spear is in his hand. His shield half covered with clouds, is like the darkened moon; when one half still remains in the wave, and the other looks sickly on the field.

[54] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 473.

> His friends sit around the king, on mist; and hear the songs of Ullin: he strikes the half-viewless harp; and raises the feeble voice. The lesser heroes, with a thousand meteors, light the airy hall. Malvina rises, in the midst; a blush is on her cheek. She beholds the unknown faces of her fathers, and turns aside her humid eyes. [55]

The kingdom of Fingal in the afterlife is comprised of the same mix of the material and the immaterial that we see in the ghosts when they come down to earth. The poet's description of the "half-viewless harp" gives a sense of the transparent quality of this ghostly instrument, and "the feeble voice" of the bard makes clear that Ullin's song does not sound like any song coming from a mortal voice. And yet, traces of the material world remain, demonstrated by the "blush" on Malvina's cheek, and the "airy spear" still in Fingal's hand.

Macpherson's representation of the supernatural, and in particular the afterlife, bears clear similarities to depictions of the Otherworld in Celtic mythology, in which the boundaries that exist in the mortal world are transcended in various ways. According to Proinsias Mac Cana, the Celtic otherworld "is a changing scene of many phases." [56] The deeply liminal aspect of the Celtic imagination can be seen in its many manifestations. In the Celtic imagination, "The Land of the Living" and the realm of the dead are often depicted as two aspects of the same otherworld. This may be a result of early Irish Voyage tales which depict the otherworld as an archipelago of islands of varying and sometimes contrasting character. In the Celtic afterlife, the dead are not pale shades, but corporeal beings experiencing all the sensual pleasures of life in the mortal world; however, mortals who attempt to return from these places often meet with dire

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[55] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 193-4.
[56] Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology,* 123.

consequences. As Mac Cana notes, these Celtic Otherworlds transcend the limitations of human time: “the mortal returning from a visit there may suddenly become aged and decrepit on contact with the material world, or he may simply dissolve into dust.”[57] The Celtic Otherworld also transcends all spatial definition: “It may be reached through a cave, through a magic mist—or simply through the granting of sudden *insight.*”[58] Caves and mist are both associated with the manifestation of ghosts in Macpherson’s supernatural imaginary, which resonates with the Celtic idea that both of these aspects of the natural world are liminal—caves as spaces at the juncture between above and below, and mist as a form in-between water and air. The constantly shifting, malleable quality that is a defining feature of the Celtic Otherworld is shared by the supernatural world in Macpherson’s poetry, in its associations between humans and nature, and in its representation of the permeable boundary between the living and the dead.

Another vivid example of ghosts emerging from atmospheric elements of the natural world occurs in the seventh book of *Temora* when the ghost of the fallen warrior Fillan appears to his father, Fingal, while he sleeps. The poem opens with a description of this ghostly visitation, which is intimately connected to the landscape in which it takes place:

> From the wood-skirted waters of Lego, ascend, at times, grey-bosomed mists, when the gates of the west are closed on the sun’s eagle-eye. Wide, over Lara’s stream, is poured the vapour dark and deep: the moon, like a dim shield, is swimming thro’ its folds. With this, clothe the spirits of old their sudden gestures on the wind, when they stride, from blast to blast, along the dusky face of the night. Often, blended with the gale, to some warrior’s grave, they roll the mist, a grey dwelling to his ghost, until the songs arise.

[57] Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology,* 124.
[58] Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology,* 124.

> A sound came from the desart; the rushing course of Conar in winds. He poured his deep mist on Fillan, at blue-winding Lubar. –Dark and mournful sat the ghost, bending in his grey ridge of smoak. The blast, at times, rolled him together: but the lovely form returned again. It returned with slow-bending eyes: and dark winding locks of mist. [59]

The poet's description of the ghosts rising from the waters of the lake, striding "from blast to blast" on the wind, clothing themselves in the water's vapors, and blending with the gale as they take shape out of mist, demonstrates the utterly fluid and changing nature of the ghost's material manifestation, and how deeply it is connected to the landscape they inhabit. We also see here how Fillan begins as a figure of smoke, then is rolled together by the wind into his recognizably "lovely form", but now with "winding locks of mist" for hair. This description of Fillan's ghost is typical of the way ghosts are illustrated in the poems in that it's often difficult to tell where the ghost ends and the atmospheric elements surrounding it begin, so what's described is a figure that has some recognizable aspects of its previous human shape, but is half-composed of atmospheric elements that are constantly changing form (like clouds, smoke, and mist). The result is the ultimate figure of liminality, that is continually shifting not only its physical form, but shifting between a material and an immaterial state of being. It's as if the ghost is changing shape so quickly before the poet's eyes that the description cannot catch up.

What's also significant about this ghostly representation is the emphasis on a particular landscape. The ghosts emerge from the mists of this lake for a reason, as Macpherson explains in a lengthy footnote at the beginning of the poem:

> The signification of Leigo, is, *the lake of disease,* probably so called, on account of the morasses which surrounded it. As the mist, which rose from the lake of Lego, occasioned diseases and death, the bards feigned, as here, that it was the residence of the ghosts of the deceased, during the interval between their death

[59] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 279.

> and the pronouncing of the funeral elegy over their tombs; for it was not allowable, without that ceremony was performed, for the spirits of the dead to mix with their ancestors, *in their airy halls.* [60]

Macpherson goes on to explain that Lego is a lake in Connaught, in which the river Lara empties itself. Ossian mentions it often because, according to Macpherson, "On the banks of this lake dwelt Branno, the father-in-law of Ossian, whom the poet often visited before and after the death of Evir-allin."[61] What we see here is not only a description of the way ghosts take shape from the elements of the natural world, but also, the significance of a strong connection to specificity of place, demonstrated here by Macpherson's mention of this particular lake and stream having a bearing on the view of the dead at this time, as well as significance for Ossian as a character. This shows how the poetry was generated from the specific setting in which it was written, making clear there is a vital link between the poet, and his particular context, just as the ghosts take shape out of the organic matter around them. This points not only to the importance of the natural world in the Ossianic imagination, but also, again to the interchangeable relationship between humans and their environment, and therefore, to the value of nature and the natural world.

This deep reverence for the natural world, and the landscape of the Highlands in particular, is further illustrated by Macpherson's mention in this passage of a poet from the western isles, by the name of Turloch Ciabhglas, who lived after Ossian, and was

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[60] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 515.

[61] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 515.
Evirallin is Ossian's lover, now dead. She is the mother of Ossian's son Oscar. Her ghost visits Ossian at the beginning of Book IV of *Fingal,* to warn him of a threat to Oscar's life: "…of Everallin were my thoughts, when she, in all the light of beauty, and her blue eyes rolling in tears, stood on a cloud before my sight, and spoke with feeble voice.// O Ossian, rise and save my son; save Oscar chief of men, near the red oak of Lubar's stream he fights with Lochlin's sons.—She sunk into her cloud again" (Macpherson 84).

purportedly so inspired by Ossian's poetic descriptions of the landscape, that he preferred them to the embrace of a lover. Macpherson translates the passage as follows: "More pleasant to me is the night of Cona, dark-streaming from Ossian's harp; more pleasant it is to me, than a white-bosomed dweller between my arms; than a fair-handed daughter of heroes, in the hour of rest." [62] The association evoked here between poetry and sexual love, and the stated preference for poetry, hints at another valence of the queer imaginary created by Macpherson's poems. Love or desire experienced for something other than physical bodily pleasure is queer in the sense that it expands the framework for what is desirable beyond what's recognized by the dictates of heterosexuality.

The poet's sensual descriptions of the natural world, and the affect created in the reader who prefers them to the embrace of a lover, is queer in the sense that it lies outside of the prevailing organization of sexuality. In a similar way to how d'Aulnoy's fairy tales illustrate an expansion of the category of desire to include plants, animals, and other aspects of the natural world beyond the human, Macpherson's poems elicit an intense appreciation for the natural landscapes of Scotland and Ireland, and an appreciation for the poetic expressions that describe these landscapes, what Ossian sometimes refers to in his poetic soliloquies as the "joy of grief."[63] The notion of preferring the pleasure offered by poetry to the physical pleasure offered by a lover is yet another way in which the poems complicate the various hierarchies associated with the mind/body distinction (or spiritual/physical). In situations of desire, we would expect bodily pleasure to take

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[62] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 516.

[63] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 283.
Ossian uses this construction multiple times throughout *The Works of Ossian.* On other occasion, in the poem "Croma," Ossian tells Malvina of the pleasure invoked by songs of grief: "It is lovely, O Malvina, but it melts the soul. There is joy in grief when peace dwells in the breast of the sad" (Macpherson 187).

precedence over mental or emotional pleasure, but the poems invert these associations by acknowledging the value in emotional pleasure (even if it comes from a sorrowful subject).

Furthermore, the intensity of these poetic expressions of melancholy, and the way in which the poet (both Ossian as fictional poet, as well as Macpherson) derives a kind of pleasure from these sorrowful feelings suggests another form of queer pleasure—queer in the sense that it's non-sexual, and also, not necessarily the emotion we would expect to be linked with feelings of sorrow and grief. While it may seem like a stretch to claim that the articulation of poetic feelings is queer, the emphasis on feelings in Macpherson's poetry, especially feelings of sorrow and the pleasure those sorrowful feelings elicit, challenges the notion that the most desirable form of pleasure is bodily physical pleasure, or the pleasure derived from positive emotions. One could posit that there's a sort of masochistic pleasure in the indulgence of sorrowful feelings to the extent that Ossian partakes in them in his poetry, an experience which was shared by many early readers of the poems, perhaps most famously, by Goethe, whose best-selling novel, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (The Sorrows of Young Werther, 1774), was modeled on the elegiac mood established by Macpherson's poems.[64] *The Works of Ossian* became famous for its ability to elicit an intense emotional—and often, physical—response in its readers.[65]

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[64] The critical scene in the novel, when Werther meets with his beloved Charlotte one last time before his suicide, recounts how Werther reads to Charlotte from his own translation of *Ossian,* (most of the very long passage cited in Goethe's text is from "The Songs of Selma"), and how they are both moved to violent paroxysms of emotion, excessive sobbing, and torrents of tears. For more of Macpherson's influence on Goethe, see F. J. Lamport's "Goethe, Ossian and Werther" in *From Gaelic to Romantic Ossianic Translations.* Ed. Fiona Stafford & Howard Gaskill. Rodopi, 1998. p. 97-106.

[65] Andrew Ersinke, wrote in a letter to James Boswell after reading *Fingal,* that certain passages set his "whole frame trembling with ecstacy; but if I was to describe all my thoughts, you would think me absolutely mad. The beautiful wildness of his fancy is inexpressibly agreeable to the imagination" (Stafford, *The Sublime Savage* 1); the first Swedish translator of Ossian, Johan Gothenius, wrote to a friend upon finally acquiring his own copy of the poems, "I've been reading again today and have wept more than

Thus, by recognizing other less acceptable forms of pleasure, Macpherson's poetic corpus normalizes expressions of desire and affect that lie outside of a heterosexual framework.

In addition to the poetic appreciation for the natural world in Macpherson's poetry, the sensual descriptions of the ghosts of dead lovers, and the desire the living characters experience for them is queer as well. Although the living characters' desire for the ghosts is represented as longing rather than explicitly sexual desire, there is a sensual attention paid to the ghostly bodies, which are assembled out of pieces of the natural world, and therefore, displays a queer kind of desire in the way that it is both non-sexual and non-human. Desire for a ghost in Macpherson's universe entails desire for a non-corporeal being, as well as desire for the natural world because the ghostly bodies are always comprised of natural elements. Take for example, Macpherson's commentary on the description of Ossian's mother, Ros-crána, in Book IV of *Temora,* when she is compared to "a spirit of heaven half-folded in the skirt of a cloud."[66] As Macpherson explains:

> the ideas of those times, concerning the spirits of the deceased, were not so gloomy and disagreeable, as those of succeeding ages. The spirits of women, it was supposed, retained that beauty, which they possessed while living, and transported themselves, from place to place, with that gliding motion, which Homer ascribes to the gods. The descriptions which poets, less antient than Ossian, have left us of those beautiful figures, that appeared sometimes on the hills, are elegant and picturesque. They compare them to the *rain-bow on streams:* or, *the gliding of sun-beams on the hills.*[67]

once" (Graves 200); and German poet and philosopher, Johan Gottfried Herder, was so taken with the atmospheric Celtic landscape in the poems that he reportedly would often catch a cold from lying out on damp hill slopes during his "Ossianic moods" (Porter 419).

[66] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 256.

[67] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 497.

He then cites a passage from one such poem, in which a chief returns from war to discover that his lover has died. After expressing his sorrow, the mournful chief utters the following: "Is that a rain-bow on Crunath? It flies:—and the sky is dark. Again, thou movest, bright, on the heath, thou sun-beam cloathed in a shower!—Hah! It is she, my love: her gliding course on the bosom of winds!"[68] This passage cited by Macpherson to demonstrate the phenomenon of ghosts appearing to their lovers as shimmering rainbows and flashes of sunlight is not only demonstrative of the same kind of transformative logic found in the human-nature comparisons noted above, it also reveals the way desire in the poems incorporates a much broader category than just the human. To envision one's dead lover as a transformed rainbow speaks to an imaginative capacity that recognizes the mutability of forms and an appreciation for those kinds of transformations in the material world. The constantly moving, gliding quality to the chief's transformed lover, appearing and disappearing like flashes of light, also speaks to the impermanent and constantly shifting make-up of the Celtic imagination that Macpherson is channeling in his poems.

In a similar erotically charged passage in the poem "Comála", the young woman Comála, who is in love with Fingal, is told that he has just been killed in battle. She expresses her grief by posing the following series of rhetorical questions: "Who fell on Carun's grassy banks, son of the cloudy night? Was he white as the snow of Ardven? Blooming as the bow of the shower? Was his hair like the mist of the hill, soft and curling in the day of the sun? Was he like the thunder of heaven in battle? Fleet as the roe of the desart?"[69] Notice how she not only compares her fallen lover to a rainbow, but her

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[68] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 497.
[69] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 106.

use of the word "blooming" suggests the same kind of shifting, transient quality as the image of the chief's dead wife in the passage cited by Macpherson. The same characteristics are present in the image she uses to describe his hair as well; in comparing it to mist she endows it with the same shifting, ethereal quality, further emphasized by her mention of the sun, which implies that soon it will evaporate completely. The focus on the fleeting nature of these natural comparisons underscores the ontology of transformation and liminality evoked within these poems. The emphasis within this poetic universe is on the shifting, transitory quality of all life in the material world—whether a human life, that of a deer, or even a clap of thunder. In recognizing the shared mortality of all of these forms of life, a kind of equality is established between them, similar to the equality we saw in d'Aulnoy's democratizing depictions of kings being stripped of their power and made aware of their vulnerability when transformed into birds and sheep. Furthermore, these erotically charged descriptions are queer because they show Conála's desire for her lover *through* aspects of the natural world, therefore communicating a kind of desire by association for snow and thunder and deer.

One final example of an erotic description of a ghost that showcases the same kind of shifting, transformative ontology, as well as an eroticization of the natural world, comes in the poem "Croma." This poem is one of the many laments for the death of Oscar that exists in Macpherson's Ossianic corpus, this time, spoken by Oscar's lover, Malvina, daughter of Toscar. The poem opens with the following description of Oscar's ghost visiting Malvina while she sleeps:

> It was the voice of my love! few are his visits to the dreams of Malvina! Open your airy halls, ye fathers of mighty Toscar. Unfold the gates of your clouds; the steps of Malvina's departure are near. I have heard a voice in my dream. I feel the fluttering of my soul. Why didst thou come, O blast, from the dark-rolling of the

> lake? Thy rustling wing was in the trees, the dream of Malvina departed. But she beheld her love, when his robe of mist flew on the wind; the beam of the sun was on his skirts, they glittered like the gold of the stranger. It was the voice of my love! few are his visits to my dreams! [70]

The details of Oscar approaching in a blast from the "dark-rolling" lake and clothing himself in a "robe of mist" are consistent with the other depictions we have seen of ghosts arriving on the wind, and making their presence known through the wind's "rustling" movement in the trees. The beam of sun she sees glittering "on his skirts" (which are presumably also made of mist) is similar to Conála's evocation of Fingal's curling hair evaporating in the presence of the sun, and therefore communicates the same fleeting characteristic. Her description of the "fluttering" of her soul at her lover's approach is evidence of how affected she is by his presence, but we can also see in her use of this expression, how the poem once again blurs the distinction between the material and immaterial. A soul is something immaterial, but here, the reference to its "fluttering" gives it a tangible, material aspect, in the same way the ethereal figures of the ghosts take on material shape through the clouds and wind.

Malvina's mention of the airy halls of her ancestors making ready for her approach also references one of the primary functions of the ghosts in Ossian's world, which is to prophesize and bring warnings about the future to those who are still alive, most often to foretell a coming death. The ghosts' prophetic function in the poems speaks to the curious way they circumvent the rules governing linear time. Instead, their presence suggests a cyclical, or layered understanding of time in that they simultaneously encompass and are able to exist in the past, the present, and the future. Malvina fears that

[70] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 187.

her lover's appearance in her dreams foretells her own approaching death, which is the case in many of the poems in the Ossianic corpus. The examples of this are too numerous to list, but one such instance occurs in Book IV of *Temora* when the warrior Cathmor is visited by Cairbar's ghost in a dream to warn him of his own death in battle soon after.[71] According to Macpherson's numerous footnotes, the Highlanders had a seemingly endless repertoire of ways their deaths could be foretold. In addition to a visitation from the ghost of someone you knew in life, your death could also be communicated to you via the ghosts of bards, singing "for three nights preceding the death (near the place where his tomb was to be raised) round an unsubstantial figure which represented the body of the person who was to die."[72] In a footnote to the first book of *Fingal*, Macpherson mentions another method the ghosts would use to give notice of a coming death, which was to ride, shrieking on their meteors, surrounding the place where the person was to die, demonstrating once again the close link between the ghosts and the natural world.[73]

Although ghosts are the most frequent messengers of death, the other figure who is connected to the supernatural realm of the dead most closely is the bard himself. We've seen how the ghosts of bards can foretell a death, but the living bard himself, as a conduit to the supernatural, can also predict a death, through his harp. Macpherson explains the phenomenon, in a note to the seventh book of *Temora,* as follows:

[71] "Cairbar came to his dreams, half-seen from the low-sung cloud. Joy rose darkly in his face: he had heard the song of Carril. –A blast sustained his dark-skirted cloud; which he seized in the bosom of the night, as he rose, with his fame, towards his airy hall. Half-mixed with the noise of the stream, he poured his feeble words" (Macpherson 258). The ghost then goes on to tell of Cathmor's coming death in battle.
[72] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 500.
[73] "It was long the opinion of the ancient Scots, that a ghost was heard shrieking near the place where a death was to happen soon after. […] The ghost comes mounted on a meteor, and surrounds twice of thrice the place destined for the person to die; and then goes along the road through which the funeral is to pass, shrieking at intervals; at last, the meteor and ghost disappear above the burial place" (Macpherson 425).

> It was the opinion of the times, that, on the night preceding the death of a person worthy and renowned, the harps of those bards, who were retained by his family, emitted melancholy sounds. This was attributed, to use Ossian's expression, *to the light touch of ghosts*; who were supposed to have a fore-knowledge of events. The same opinion prevailed long in the north, and the particular sound was called, *the warning voice of the dead.* [74]

We see this come to pass in various poems throughout the Ossianic corpus, but one particularly evocative instance occurs in the poem, "Dar-thula," when Ossian's harp plays by itself, to communicate the death of some of Fingal's men:

> We sat, that night, in Selma round the strength of the shell. The wind was abroad, in the oaks; the spirit of the mountain shrieked. The blast came rustling through the hall, and gently touched my harp. The sound was mournful and low, like the song of the tomb. Fingal heard it first, and the crowded sighs of his bosom rose. – Some of my heroes are low, said the gray-haired king of Morven. I hear the sound of death on the harp of my son. Ossian, touch the sounding string; bid the sorrow rise; that their spirits may fly with joy to Morven's woody hills.
>
> I touched the harp before the king, the sound was mournful and low. Bend forward from your clouds, I said, ghosts of my fathers! Bend; lay by the red terror of your course, and receive the falling chief; whether he comes from a distant land, or rises from the rolling sea. Let his robe of mist be near; his spear that is formed of a cloud. Place an half-extinguished meteor by his side, in the form of the hero's sword. And, oh! Let his countenance be lovely, that his friends may delight in his presence. Bend from your clouds, I said, ghosts of my fathers! bend.[75]

I include this scene in its entirely because it illustrates not only the phenomenon of the harp playing "the sound of death" by itself, but also because it shows the power of the bard to summon the spirits of the dead through his music. Here, we see Ossian, playing his harp, and through his song, requesting that the ghosts of his ancestors come to greet the spirits of those who have recently died. The bard's special power to not only

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[74] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 517.
[75] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 146.

communicate with, but also, control the spirits of the dead is illustrated here, and music is revealed to be a powerful link with the realm of the dead.

The elegiac function of the bard as orphic medium can therefore be seen in his ability to call up the spirits of the dead through his music. In these scenes, as in the other ghostly visitations, the ghosts often manifest through elements of the natural landscape. In another example of the connection between ghosts, the memory of the dead, and the natural world, at the beginning of the sixth book of *Fingal,* Ossian describes his memory of Cuchullin's bard Carril singing songs of praise:

> Still on the darkening Lena arose in my ears the tuneful voice of Carril. He sung of the companions of our youth, and the days of former years; when we met on the banks of Lego, and sent round the joy of the shell. Cromla, with its cloudy steeps, answered to his voice. The ghosts of those he sung came in their rustling wind. They were seen to bend with joy towards the sound of their praise. [76]

Carril's song is so evocative that Ossian describes the landscape itself (Cromla is the name of a hill in Ulster) answering in reply. This visceral, almost animate response of the natural world in answer to the bard's music is evidence of the spiritual presence in the material world that we saw earlier in Ossian's address to the memorial stone. The hills of Cromla are able to answer the bard because there is a life force within nature in Ossian's liminal Celtic world. It is significant as well that Carril's song summons the ghosts of those he is singing about who "came in their rustling wind," as it implies that the bard's music has the power to literally summon the dead. [77] There is magic power in the music of the bards that enables them to communicate with those no longer living. This is the very power that Ossian himself possesses as the bard at the center of these poems.

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[76] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 99.
[77] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 99.

Part of the bard's power stems from his acute sensitivity to the world around him, which allows him to perceive the spirits of the dead in the natural world. In the paragraph following Ossian's description of the ghosts bending with "joy towards the sound of their praise," it becomes clear that Ossian is remembering this scene from the past, and as he remembers, he now speaks to the ghost of Carril in an attempt to bring his friend's spirit to him, to play his song again:

> Be thy soul blest, O Carril, in the midst of thy eddying winds. O that thou wouldst come to my hall when I am alone by night!—And thou dost come, my friend, I hear often thy light hand on my harp; when it hangs on the distant wall, and the feeble sound touches my ear. Why dost thou not speak to me in my grief, and tell when I shall behold my friends? But thou passest away in thy murmuring blast; and thy wind whistles through the gray hair of Ossian. [78]

Here, we witness again the power of the bard's speech as Ossian describes how Carril's ghost comes when he calls him. After the apostrophic utterance: "O that thou wouldst come to my hall when I am alone by night!", Ossian describes how Carril's ghost *does* come. What is also significant here is the material manifestation of the ghost through its "light hand" on Ossian's harp, and through the sound it produces. The fact that the ghost is able to produce any kind of sound on the harp strings suggests that there is some material quality to its hand; and although the sound may be "feeble" it does succeed in "touch[ing]" the bard's ear. All of these details underscore the liminal quality of the ghost's simultaneously material and immaterial presence, which in turn contribute to the impression of the ghost being both present and painfully absent.

The same material/immaterial contradiction can be seen in the way Ossian experiences his friend's ghost as wind whistling through his hair. Whether the wind

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[78] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 99.

Ossian perceives is the blast of air caused by the ghost's rapid movement, or the actual semi-material form of the ghost himself, it is significant that Ossian is experiencing his friend's presence as a material force moving through his hair, and also, that that movement produces a sound, because even if Ossian does not hear his friend's voice, Carril is still present for a moment—even if only as a whistling wind—before vanishing again. This is not only evidence of Macpherson's blurring of the material/spiritual divide; it also emphasizes the sensitivity of Ossian's powers of perception. That he can hear the sound of the harp even if it is feeble and feel the movement of the ghost through his hair is significant because it demonstrates his role in the poem as a medium through which the ghosts can communicate. It further illustrates his status as a liminal figure in the poem that can mediate between different realms—he has the ability to interpret these physical details as signs from his dead friend. These ephemeral and almost insubstantial details of Carril's ghost convey both a presence and an absence at the same time. So Ossian experiences his friend's presence, but only partially, and not in the way that he wishes. This melancholy interaction, filled with loss and longing, is representative of the elegiac tone that characterizes all of the poems in *The Works of Ossian*. The bard's role as an intermediary with the spirit world is thus deeply connected to the bard's elegizing and memorializing function, and his status as a liminal figure between worlds.

Ossian is also represented as a liminal figure when he appears in Irish tradition (where he is known as Oisín), most frequently in stories about Finn mac Cumaill (the Irish version of Fingal), and the other warriors of the *fiana,* in the Fenian cycle of tales. The Irish Oisín has clear ties with the supernatural, and indeed, explicit ties with the realm of the fairies, as well as the kinds of animal/human couplings we saw in

d'Aulnoy's fairy tales. According to one early Irish text, the *Agallamh na Senórach*, or Colloquy with the Ancients (preserved in a fourteenth century manuscript, and probably a composition of the thirteenth century), Oisín "is stated to have passed into the *sidh* (fairy mound) of his mother Blai, who is said, the oldest authority being a marginal note in the Book of Leinster, probably of the thirteenth century, to have born him whilst she was in doe shape." [79] In another version of this tale from Irish tradition, Oisín's mother is called Saba, and we learn that she first appeared to Oisín's father Finn in the shape of a deer.[80] Finn names their child Oisín, which means 'Little Fawn.' Oisín's origins in this Irish story, as the offspring of a human father and part-animal mother, strike a resounding chord with the many animal human couplings in d'Aulnoy's tales (in particular, "La Biche au bois"), and depicts him as a figure with close ties to the natural world, as well as a figure with deep links to magic and transformation, as he is literally the offspring of a mortal man and a hybrid animal mother.

Oisín's proximity to the natural world is also related to his associations with the supernatural or fairy realm, demonstrated by another tale about Oisín from Ireland, which tells of Oisín being courted by the fairy, "Niam of the Golden Hair," whose father is "King of the Land of Youth," or in Irish, Tir na n'Og.[81] He rides away with her to her kingdom in the West, over the sea, where she tells him, he shall rule at her side as king. Oisín dwells with her there, delighting in all the pleasures of this fairy kingdom where

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[79] Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran,* 152.

[80] Enchanted by a dark druid for refusing his love, she tells Finn that with his love she shall be safe from all enchantments and can live in her natural shape. Although she is eventually stolen away by the druid again, she and Finn live together happily for a time, and seven years after her disappearance, while out hunting with his men, Finn comes upon a wild boy, who tells them he had been raised in the mountains by a deer mother. This is Oisín.

[81] Rolleston, *Myths & Legends,* 270.

age and death do not exist, for what seems to him the span of three weeks; but when he returns via her magic horse to Ireland, he learns, to his horror, that three hundred years have passed, and all his comrades have long since perished. The men he encounters tell him that in the time he has been away St. Patrick has come to Ireland bringing with him Christianity and the teachings of Christ. The men bring Oisín before St. Patrick so he can tell what has befallen him, and Patrick has his scribes record Oisín's memories of the heroes who once lived in Ireland.

Although the episode of Oisín's courtship with the fairy Niam exists only in Michael Comyn's 1750 poem ("Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth"), the older manuscripts all recount the prolongation of Oisín's life, and his meeting with St. Patrick. In many of the poems about Ossian in the Scottish manuscript, the Book of the Dean of Lismore (which recent scholars have shown likely served as one of Macpherson's sources), Ossian is old and the last of his people, just as in Macpherson's poems.[82] What's consistent in the stories and legends about Ossian from both Ireland and Scotland, regardless of the supernatural content, is his fame as a warrior, but most especially, as a great poet. Although Macpherson's poems contain no details about Ossian's hybrid animal mother, or his sojourns in Fairy Land with a supernatural lover, Macpherson's Ossian still functions as a figure with a unique connection to a supernatural otherworld in his ability to converse with the ghosts of his dead loved ones. Thus, he remains a liminal figure in Macpherson's poetry, even if the link between Ossian and the magical worlds he frequents in the Irish tradition do not show up in Macpherson's poems. Comparing

[82] As Kuno Meyer states: "a supernaturally prolonged life is presupposed by the extensive body of Ossianic poetry, which brings the hero in contact with St. Patrick, and which must be at least as old as the fourteenth century, as it is found, in an obviously worn-down condition, in the Book of the Dean of Lismore, a Scotch Gaelic MS. of the late fifteenth century" (152).

Macpherson's Ossian with his Irish counterpart gives us a glimpse of just how dynamic the tradition of Ossianic stories and songs is in the British Isles (and, after the publication of Macpherson's poems, beyond the British Isles).[83] Like d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, which exist in countless versions and variations published both before and after she published her tales, if we approach Macpherson's poems from a folklorist's point of view, we can see how Macpherson's Ossian is just one version in a vast and vibrant tradition. Just as fairy tales, ballads and other forms of folklore are defined by their constant transformation and existence in new versions and new forms, so Macpherson's creative intervention in the fragments he compiled and translated is just one version of a figure who is continually re-drawn in the folkloric imagination.

The stories about Oisín from the Irish tradition which tell of his visits to "The Land of Youth" share similarities with stories from Irish folklore about human encounters with the *sídhe* or fairy folk. Those mortals who survive their visits to the fairy realm often return with special gifts or abilities. Scotland has similar stories, including a ballad called "Thomas the Rhymer," about a man named Thomas who is chosen by the Queen of the Fairies to ride with her into her Fairy realm where he lives with her for seven years. He must be silent the whole of his time in Fairyland but when he returns to the mortal realm years later, he has gained the gift of second sight (and in some versions, the gift of music and poetry). The ballad first appeared in 1802 in Walter Scott's collection of Scottish

[83] Many readers were so moved by the poems they were inspired to create something "Ossianic" of their own in response. Blake, Burns, Byron, Coleridge, Scott, Wordsworth, and Yeats are just a few of the poets directly inspired by Macpherson's work, and it was not just philosophers and poets who were inspired by Macpherson's poetry. As James Porter relates, "a host of other creative artists" were affected by the Ossianic legacy, including painters like "Gérard, Girodet, and Ingres, all of whom contributed to the Ossianic canvasses commissioned by Napoleon at Malmaison", as well as musicians and composers such as Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and Felix Mendelssohn (Porter 396-7).

border ballads, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. This ballad, like others that tell of mortal encounters with the supernatural, establishes a connection between the poet's gifts and the world of the fairies by demonstrating that his prophetic powers were given to him by his Fairy Lover for keeping silent for seven years.

"Thomas the Rhymer" belongs to a group of ballads about relationships between mortals and their supernatural lovers—sometimes consensual, as in "Thomas the Rhymer," and sometimes decidedly not—as in the Scottish ballad, "King Orfeo" (appearing for in print for the first time in Francis J. Child's comprehensive collection, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads,* 1882-1898), which is a variant of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. "King Orfeo," which was recorded in the Shetland Islands in the nineteenth century, tells of a king's wife who is carried off by the fairies. The king is able to win her back by playing his harp for the fairy king, who is so charmed by the music, he returns the wife to her rightful husband. The king's musical abilities, which are so impressive as to enchant a fairy king, are similar to Ossian's powerful abilities to commune with the dead via his harp. Stories of this kind that link musical abilities and bardic figures with a supernatural otherworld, showcase the ways in which music in the folkloric imagination often has actual magic power. This shows up in Macpherson's poetry not only through Ossian as a conduit to the supernatural world of the dead, but also in the way his harp seems to possess a power of its own, as we saw in the earlier example, when the harp played the sound of death.

Indeed, there are several moments throughout Macpherson's poems where the harp is represented as a powerful supernatural object that is not only in possession of magical powers but is recognized as a living entity with a spirit of its own. We see this in

the following scene from the fifth book of *Temora* when Ossian begins the poem with an address to his harp:

> Thou dweller between the shields that hang on high in Ossian's hall, descend from thy place, O harp, and let me hear thy voice. —Son of Alpin, strike the string; thou must awake the soul of the bard. The murmur of Lora's stream has rolled the tale away.—I stand in the cloud of years: few are its opening towards the past, and when the vision comes it is but dim and dark.—I hear thee, harp of Cona; my soul returns, like a breeze, which the sun brings back to the vale, where dwelt the lazy mist. [84]

Ossian's apostrophic address to the harp, and his reference to the harp's "voice" establishes the harp as a living entity that Ossian relies on to perform his role as bard; his pleas to the harp to "wake the soul of the bard" show just how intimate their relationship is, in the way that Ossian's soul is connected to the instrument. Ossian's speech also demonstrates the critical role the harp plays in bringing back his memories of the past, which have become "dim and dark" as Ossian stands lost "in the cloud of years." [85] These references to Ossian struggling to access his memories of the past situate this scene in the time when Ossian is old and blind and alone, years after the major events of the poem. This scene is representative of the way time in the poems defies any sense of linearity as we move back and forth from past to present, guided by Ossian's lyric interjections, which pull us (often quite abruptly) from the past into the present of Ossian's old age. Similar to the ghosts, the harp appears to be an object that also has the ability to exist outside of linear time, acting as a conduit for Ossian to the past, and sometimes, the future—demonstrated by the harp's prophetic abilities to foretell death. The music of the

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[84] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 263.
[85] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 263.

harp, represented here as a breeze carried by the presence of the sun, scatters the obfuscating mist of Ossian's forgetful confusion to bring his soul back to him again.

In another scene that depicts the powerful ability of the harp to conjure up Ossian's memories of the past, he also speaks to the harp as though to a friend, in the poem, "Conlath and Cuthóna." This poem, like several other poetic fragments in *The Works of Ossian*, is structured as a dialogue between several speakers, who are identified by name. The poem opens with Ossian being visited by the ghost of Conlath, one of Fingal's warriors who died abroad. Macpherson tells us in his notes at the beginning of the poem that when Fingal sent one of his men to bury Conlath and his lover Cuthóna, he forgot to send a bard to sing the funeral song over their tombs, which was a serious error, as Macpherson explains: "it was the opinion of those times, that the souls of the deceased were not happy, till their elegies were composed by a bard." [86] Thus, Conlath appears before Ossian, years later, "to intreat him to transmit, to posterity, his and Cuthóna's fame." [87] After delivering his request to Ossian, Conlath vanishes, leaving Ossian to speak to the empty air and struggle to recall his memories of that time. Ossian addresses his harp directly to aid him:

> Come from thy wall, my harp, and let me hear thy sound. Let the light of memory rise on I-thona; that I may behold my friends. And Ossian does behold his friends, on the dark-blue isle. –The cave of Thona appears, with its mossy rocks and bending trees. A stream roars at its mouth, and Toscar bends over its course. Fercuth is sad by his side: and the maid of his love sits at a distance, and weeps. Does the wind of the waves deceive me? Or do I hear them speak? [88]

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[86] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 443.
[87] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 443.
[88] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 124.

Illustrated clearly in this soliloquy is the harp's supernatural ability to conjure up Ossian's memories of the past, which return to him so strongly that it seems as though the harp has the power to bring the dead back to life. The next line of the poem is spoken by Toscar, one of the warriors long since dead, and the poem continues in the voices of the dead until the close of the poem, when Ossian speaks again to state that he has done what was asked by Conlath's ghost, requesting that the ghost refrain from visiting him again so that he can sleep. This poem demonstrates not only the magical abilities of the harp, and its pseudo-sentient status in the poems, but also illustrates the elegiac function of the bard and his abilities.

One final example reveals the significance of the harp both to Ossian's ability to remember the past, and also, to the preservation and deliverance of his soul to the afterlife, which is carried there through the harp's music in the poem "Berrathon." Upon his departure from the mortal world, Ossian speaks to his harp one last time, asking it to bear his soul away:

> My harp hangs on a blasted branch. The sound of its strings is mournful. –Does the wind touch thee, O harp, or is it some passing ghost! –It is the hand of Malvina! but bring me the harp, son of Alpin; another song shall rise. My soul shall depart in the sound; my fathers shall hear it in their airy hall. –Their dim faces shall hang, with joy, from their clouds; and their hands receive their son. [89]

Once again, by making the harp the subject of Ossian's apostrophic address, the poet represents the harp as an entity with a will of its own, which reveals the spirituality present even in objects in the material world we do not typically consider alive. Music is once again shown to be a conduit to the supernatural otherworld since it is through the harp's song that Ossian's soul will depart. Like many of the poetic images in

[89] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 197.

Macpherson's poems that shift and combine in such a way that makes them difficult to untangle and pin down, the poet's representation of the harp offers several possibilities for the harp's ability to play unaccompanied. Although Macpherson writes in his footnotes that it was believed that the "sound of death" was caused by the fingers of ghosts playing the strings of the harp, in the passage cited earlier when Fingal and Ossian hear the harp make this sound, the poet writes that it was caused by the blast of wind that comes rushing through the hall. The same ambiguity is depicted here, when Ossian himself asks the harp: "Does the wind touch thee… or is it some passing ghost?" This conflation of ghosts and wind makes it impossible for us (or Ossian) to know for certain whether it is just the wind, or the ghost of his beloved Malvina, waiting to guide him to the afterlife through the harp's song. However, by speaking to his harp as though it were a living entity with powers of its own, Ossian invokes a third possibility, which is that the harp is able to play itself because it contains a spirit, or a life-force of its own.

These depictions in Macpherson's poetry of the harp as an object with a potential life force and power of its own, and with deep ties to the immaterial realm of the dead, has resonances with another ballad in Scott's 1802 collection already invoked in the introduction of this dissertation, which is the ballad of "The Twa Sisters" (known in Scott's collection as "The Cruel Sister"). As we have already seen, this ballad tells the story of a harp made from the bones and hair of a girl who is drowned by her jealous sister. Like Ossian's harp, endowed with the power to predict a coming death through its mournful sound, the bone harp plays its song without the touch of the musician's hand, recounting the details of the drowned girl's death by singing directly from the dead girl's bones. Both instruments possess a supernatural ability that enables them to play alone,

and both instruments transgress the boundary between the living and the dead by offering messages from the realm beyond the living. In some versions of the ballad, the harp's song also causes the death of the guilty sister—either directly by causing her heart to burst, or by requesting that she be put to death in answer for her crimes. Therefore, the bone-harp's song shares a similarly prophetic ability with Ossian's harp when it sounds "the warning voice of the dead" described by Macpherson, as the drowned sister's voice sings out from her bones to call for her sister's death.

The fact that the girl's spirit still resides in her physical remains is reminiscent of the ghosts' associations with the material world in Macpherson's poems, as well as the permeability of the boundary between the physical and the spiritual realms demonstrated by Macpherson's ghosts. Furthermore, the situation of a dead person seeking communication with the living via a harp has unmistakable resonances with Ossian's many conversations and interactions with the dead, and the supernatural powers of his own harp. What we see in both the ballad and Macpherson's poetry is a recognition of the mutability of the boundary between the living and the dead, as well as the recognition of music—especially the harp, which is the preferred instrument of the bard—as a means for connecting with the supernatural, or spiritual realm.

"The Twa Sisters" is a prime example of the belief that the soul and the body are intimately connected; the bones are able to sing because the sister's soul still lingers on in her material remains. In the context of the ballad, this is not merely for poetic effect, but is evidence of a worldview that believed in a greater proximity between the physical and the spiritual realms, and the capacity to move easily between them. This lack of figurative thinking demonstrated by the ballad is evidence of the same kind of liminal ontology that

I locate in Macpherson's poetry. So when Ossian describes his warriors rising "like the breaking of a blue-rolling wave," [90] or Cormac's daughter, Morna, as "snow on the heath" with "hair like the mist of Cromla," [91] he may be doing so for poetic effect, but we may also discern in these moments the remnants of an older worldview in which humans were believed to be inseparable from the natural world; and in which spirits may reside in "dead" matter, as well as living flesh. The transformation of the dead girl's body into a musical instrument aligns with the transformative logic and liminal ontology in Macpherson's poetry and other early Celtic texts, thereby demonstrating how the motif of transformation is a central component in the folkloric imagination.

The simultaneous presence/absence of the ghosts in Macpherson's poems, who are able to bring messages from a realm that mortals cannot reach, is synonymous with the role that Macpherson himself occupies as the intermediary between his contemporary audience and the poems that he is bringing to them from an absent literary tradition. While Ossian serves as the medium in the poems, communicating messages from the afterlife to his listeners, Macpherson himself occupies the same role as Ossian, acting as the medium for his readers, as he brings the tradition of the bards from the realm of oral poetry into print. In this way, the poems both *convey* a liminal ontology through the figure of the ghost and the supernatural powers of the bard, and simultaneously *perform* that same ontology by proclaiming themselves a translation, the ghost of a lost oral culture communicated by a medium (Macpherson), who isn't of the lost world, but can offer outsider access to it by conjuring it into print.

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[90] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 66.
[91] Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 57.

What I hope to have emphasized in this chapter is what we have gained through Macpherson's project—not only through what he has created in collaboration with this dynamic existing tradition of Gaelic poetry and song, but also, to give a sense of how much his work has encouraged others who have come after him to continue making art inspired by this tradition. Through his almost obsessive fixation on the bard as a melancholy figure who can commune with the dead, we have been given a glimpse not only of some genuine aspects of this Gaelic tradition, but perhaps, more importantly, how Macpherson's particular position, as a Highlander growing up in the aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, trying to 'make it' as an author in Lowland Scotland, influenced his decisions in his creative engagement with that material.

Finally, the overwhelming presence of the supernatural in his poems is, as I emphasize throughout this dissertation, not an accident, but rather a symptom of Macpherson's position as a cultural outsider and a liminal figure in his own right. That he would be drawn to writing poems filled with ghosts who act as bridges to the otherworld, a world where he can still have access to the people and the culture that he has lost, teaches us something not only about eighteenth-century Scotland, but how the imaginary of the supernatural can open doors to other kinds of conceptualization, and in part, can return Macpherson to the ancient Celtic world of his imagination, where spirits dwell in nature, and ghosts move through the rivers and the wind, and the whole landscape is as alive as the human denizens who inhabit it.

CHAPTER IV

SPEAKING TO THE FOREST: QUEER COLLECTIVITY AND THE LIVING NATURAL WORLD IN THE WORK OF SELMA LAGERLÖF

Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940) is perhaps best known as the first woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1909. Although her books are not well known today in the English-speaking world, she was immensely popular during her lifetime and remains well known in Sweden today as a beloved national icon. She became the most widely translated Swedish author of her time, and in 1914 she became the first woman to be elected to the Swedish Academy, the exclusive group of eighteen authors and scholars. Some of her most beloved novels include *Jerusalem* (*Jerusalem*) (1901-02), *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa* (*The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson*) (1906-07), *Kejsarn av Portugallien* (*The Emperor of Portugallia*) (1914), and *Löwensköldstrilogin* (*The Ring Trilogy*) (1925-1928). However, it is her first novel, *Gösta Berling saga* (*The Saga of Gösta Berling*) (1891), that is still regarded by many as her greatest contribution to Swedish literature, described by Swedish literary historian Ingemar Algulin as “a prose epic permeated with Värmland folklore.”[1] Lagerlöf was profoundly influenced by the folk tales she heard growing up as a child in the Swedish province of Värmland.[2] The lively tradition of singing and storytelling that Lagerlöf was exposed to during her childhood, in combination with the rich folklore of the region, shows up in various ways throughout her writing, but is most starkly apparent in *Gösta Berlings saga*, which will be the focus of this chapter.

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[1] Algulin, *A History of Swedish Literature*, 159.
[2] Danielson, “Demonic Folk Tradition,” 192.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how James Macpherson's position in regard to the Gaelic materials he was re-writing mirrored Ossian's position in his poems as an intermediary with the lost oral traditions of the Highlands. Similarly, in *Gösta Berlings saga,* Lagerlöf serves as an intermediary with the oral storytelling traditions from her childhood, transforming the folkloric materials from her native province into the literary form of the novel to articulate a feminist and anti-patriarchal understanding of human relationships and humans' relationship to the natural world. Just as d'Aulnoy was inspired by the animal folktales recounted by her Breton nursemaid, and Macpherson was influenced by the poetic recitations praising the Highland landscape heard in his childhood, Lagerlöf's use of oral storytelling in her writing is deeply tied to the landscape from which it originates. In their transformation of these early oral influences into a supernatural context depicting an animate natural world, all three authors demonstrate the potential in folkloric materials to express a more empathetic view of the natural world.

Similar to my discussion of the formal hybridity exhibited by d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and Macpherson's poems, *Gösta Berlings saga* is queer on a formal level, in the way it mixes orality with literary qualities and poetic elements with narrative elements. As in the previous two chapters, I use the word queer to refer to that which is liminal, to that which exists in between different states of being, and therefore transgresses boundaries and limits. A queer understanding of the world by this definition operates beyond, or outside of, binary thinking. Its logic is one of expansion, of infinite possibility. Through the novel's narrator, we gain access to the queerness that exists within the world of the novel—both in terms of its depiction of gender, but perhaps even more powerfully, through the supernatural and its depiction of the spiritual presence in

the natural world. By speaking directly to the landscape and objects in the novel with the same attentive regard as the novel's human characters, and in her own constantly transforming identity, the figure of the narrator brings our attention to the liminal and transformative qualities of our world.

The world made legible to us through the presence of Lagerlöf's apostrophizing narrator is a liminal world in which boundaries dissolve and identities are continually shifting. Like in d'Aulnoy's tales of humans transforming into animals and Macpherson's poems full of corporeal ghosts, Gösta Berling's universe is one in which the natural world is filled with supernatural magic, and the boundaries between humans and the natural world, as well as the boundaries between the material/physical world of our bodies and the world of the spirits are as permeable as air. This queer boundary-crossing/border-dissolving bespeaks an understanding of the world that recognizes its shifting and multitudinous nature. Identity and desire are also boundary-less and multiple—multiple identities and desires can and often do exist simultaneously, conveyed most explicitly in the shifting identity of the narrator. This liminality is linked with the way Lagerlöf moved between boundaries and definitions in her own life, in the way she prioritized relationships with women, and lived outside of the prevailing gender norms at the turn of the twentieth century. The queer sensibility I locate in Lagerlöf's work is deeply connected to her own life.

Gösta Berlings saga therefore presents a queer understanding of the world in its articulation of the flexible boundaries between the human and non-human world, as well as the natural and the supernatural world. In a similar way to how the transgression of various binary categories in d'Aulnoy's tales (animal/human, mind/body, man/woman) is

made possible by enchantment (thereby enabling a queer enchantment), the transgression of a similar set of binary categories in *Gösta Berlings saga* is critically linked to the supernatural, and to an older worldview that comes out of oral traditions and folk beliefs. The queer supernatural in the novel makes possible this transformative worldview in the same way that it is apparent in d'Aulnoy's tales and Macpherson's poems. By illustrating the natural world and the supernatural creatures who reside there as equals to their human counterparts in the novel, Lagerlöf's narrator establishes the value of life beyond the strictly human.

Myths of the Female Author: The "Snow Queen" and the "Sagotant"

Growing up as a woman in nineteenth-century Sweden, in a time when women were still denied many basic rights, and were not considered capable of writing great literature, Lagerlöf overcame many difficulties to publish her writing and be recognized for its merits.[3] Lagerlöf's decision to prioritize her career as a writer above everything else in her life was a radical choice for women of her time, as was her decision not to marry. Lagerlöf placed women firmly at the center of her life—both romantically, as well as in her friendships and working relationships. In her private life, Lagerlöf was involved in several life-long romantic partnerships with other women that today we can recognize as queer. Foregrounding the queerness of Selma Lagerlöf's lived experience in her relationships with other women is important because these relationships were instrumental in supporting and shaping her creative life. These relationships made it possible for her not only to work the way she did (to prioritize her writing and shape her

[3] Women's suffrage was approved in Swedish parliament on May 24, 1919, and confirmed in January 1921.

life around her career) but also to imagine the kinds of worlds she did, that were not dictated by patriarchal concepts and ideals. The queerness of her inner life was therefore deeply linked to the queerness of her reality.

Lagerlöf's two most important romantic relationships were with fellow writer Sophie Elkan (1853-1921), and Lagerlöf's business partner, Valborg Olander (1861-1943). [4] What's so queer about Lagerlöf's relationships with these women is the fact that they did not follow the strictures of friendship between heterosexual women at the time, nor did they adhere to our current definition of homosexuality—rather these relationships occupied a status between hetero *and* homonormativity. Although the word queer did not exist for Lagerlöf in the way we use it today, it's a fitting term to define Lagerlöf's identity and sexuality because as Katarina Bonnevier writes, "Lagerlöf fits neither the binary categorization homo/heterosexual nor the heteronormative ideal of monogamy."[5] Her relationships with Elkan and Olander played an essential role in Lagerlöf's life, and in the development of her creative practice in a way that no relationship with a man ever did.[6]

Lagerlöf was careful to keep the queerness of her private life out of the public eye.[7] A shrewd businesswoman, Lagerlöf was also very conscious of her public image.

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[4] We know that these relationships were not simply platonic, but rather passionate and romantic, from Lagerlöf's collections of letters which were made available to the public in 1990, according to Lagerlöf's wishes, fifty years after her death. A selection of Lagerlöf's letters to Sophie Elkan were published by Ying Toijer-Nilsson in 1992 in a volume titled, *Du lär mig att bli fri: Selma Lagerlöf skriver till Sophie Elkan* ('You teach me to be free: Selma Lagerlöf writes to Sophie Elkan'); and the entirety of the collection is available at the Royal Library in Stockholm.

[5] Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains*, 333.

[6] Palm, *"Jag vill sätta världen i rörelse*," 17. "It is striking how few men at all played a role in Selma Lagerlöf's life. She lived more or less completely in a women's world, and it was also around women that her love and desire focused." Translation is mine.

[7] As Bonnevier points out, it is as if Lagerlöf knew the world was not ready for the true nature of these relationships when she died and her decision to make the letters available fifty years after her death is as if she "staged her own coming out process" (Bonnevier 259).

As she grew in popularity over the years, as her books became best-sellers and she became a household name, Lagerlöf embraced the image the public had of her as an inoffensive fairy tale aunt (*sagotant*). As Lisbeth Stenberg writes, it was in this "'aunt disguise' that she was eventually hailed as a national monument."[8] This image resulted from Lagerlöf's use of folklore in her work, but was also bound up with another popular myth about Lagerlöf's life, which is that because she never married, Lagerlöf was "frigid" and incapable of writing convincingly about sexuality or physical love. Unable to imagine a woman who would *choose* a life without men, male biographers and critics have determined that Lagerlöf must have been disappointed in love at an early age and therefore dedicated her life to writing to cope with her erotic disappointment. [9] In her 2001 study, *En genialisk lek: kritik och överskridande i Selma Lagerlöfs tidiga författarskap* (Genius at Play: Criticism and Transcendence in Selma Lagerlöf's Early Texts), Lisbeth Stenberg shows how this myth is the result of sexist and heterosexist thinking and fails to take into account the queer and feminist dimensions of Lagerlöf's life and writing.

Lagerlöf's tendency to use folklore in her novels contributed to another misogynist myth about her as a writer, which is that she lacked any artistic agency, and instead was seen as a medium who passively transmitted the oral folklore of the region where she grew up.[10] Lagerlöf's use of folklore and fantastical elements in her debut

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[8] Stenberg, *En genialisk lek*, 19. "I denna 'tantförklädnad' hyllades hon så småningom som ett nationalmonument." Translation is mine.

[9] The title of Danish writer Henrik Wivel's 1988 study on Selma Lagerlöf and love is *The Snow Queen* (*Snödrottningen*). Through readings of Lagerlöf's texts, Wivel concludes that like the spurned character of Marianne Sinclaire in *Gösta Berlings saga,* at an early age, Lagerlöf too "had closed the door of her heart and never opened it again." Wivel, *Snödrottningen,* 337.

[10] See Susan Brantly, "Into the Twentieth Century," in *A History of Swedish Literature,* ed. Lars G. Warme, vol. 3 (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 279. "For many years, the literary reputation of Selma

novel, *Gösta Berlings saga* (published in 1891), led early critics to disparage those features they viewed as the unavoidable side effects of the author's gender. Even after the influential Danish critic Georg Brandes helped turn the tide on the novel's reception by publishing a "glowing review of the Danish translation for the tone-setting newspaper *Politiken*" in January of 1893,[11] Brandes characterized Lagerlöf's talents as those of a naïve artist, who, like a child was not aware of the masterpiece she had created.

This perception of Lagerlöf as a passive re-teller of old Swedish legends and tales was also perpetuated by Swedish literary critics, Oscar Levertin and Verner von Heidenstam, who valued Lagerlöf's writing for its symbolist aesthetics and its revival of beauty and the imagination, but who saw *Gösta Berlings saga* as a novel that supported their concept of female artistic passivity. As Anna Nordlund has pointed out, Levertin "underestimated Lagerlöf's level of education and her aesthetic awareness by presupposing that as a woman and teacher she was inferior to the educated, cosmopolitan, and intellectual male contemporaries of her time."[12] Rather than recognizing Lagerlöf's skill in weaving together multiple folkloric voices and crafting a complex narrative voice out of this multiplicity, Hafstein and Levertin could only imagine Lagerlöf as passively re-telling works that were not her own, with no artistic agency.

The perception of women as passive storytellers rather than active creators is the same false binary logic that was used to celebrate Charles Perrault as an innovator of the fairy tale and relegate Madame d'Aulnoy to the role of mere scribbler, or copyist. Like

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Lagerlöf (1858-1940) was affected by Oscar Levertin's condescending assessment of her as 'just' a teller of fairy tales, whose literary strength rises from a well of folk belief and provincial mysticism. Levertin, himself steeped in stylized fin-de-siècle culture, presented Lagerlöf as a naïve purveyor of folk traditions."

[11] Schoolfield, "Introduction," xxi.

[12] Nordlund, "Corpses," 184.

d'Aulnoy, Lagerlöf's creative abilities were underestimated because of her gender. This view was compounded by the fact that Lagerlöf's debut novel was full of influences from folklore and oral traditions, and so, like d'Aulnoy, Lagerlöf was seen as having a passive role in regard to her folkloric material. The failure to acknowledge Lagerlöf's active role in shaping her folkloric materials is also the result of a one-dimensional view of creativity which disregards the multiplicity of influences that can shape creative works. This one-dimensional understanding of authorship is the same that caused difficulties for James Macpherson. Although he was spared the misogynist assumptions that dismissed d'Aulnoy's and Lagerlöf's creative abilities, his authorial intervention in the materials he was collecting and translating could only be understood as an act of forgery by his critics, rather than as an example of collective creativity.

Lagerlöf's Folkloric Sources: Collective Creativity and Oral Storytelling in the Context of the Novel

Like d'Aulnoy and Macpherson's texts, Lagerlöf's novels and short stories—and most especially, her debut novel, *Gösta Berlings saga*—are hybrid works that combine both oral and literary sources. Lagerlöf also engages with orality in a similar way to d'Aulnoy and Macpherson in the way that she re-creates an oral storytelling tradition within the context of the novel through the figure of the narrator, who acts as a conduit both to oral storytelling traditions of the past, and also, as a voice speaking to future generations. In her evocation of orality, as well as her existence outside of time, Lagerlöf's narrator shares similar characteristics with Macpherson's Ossian as the bardic representation of orality. Like Ossian, Lagerlöf's narrator also serves as an intermediary

with the supernatural and the world of folkloric belief. The dynamic presence of the narrator throughout *Gösta Berlings saga* conjures up the figure of the storyteller and the tradition of oral tale-telling in a similar way to how d'Aulnoy's fairy tales re-create the oral storytelling situation of the salon. In Lagerlöf's case, she is re-creating the fireside storytelling situations from her own childhood.

In her attitude towards her folkloric sources, Lagerlöf re-appropriated the role that Heidenstam and Levertin ascribed to her as passively transmitting folktales. Instead of letting this myth diminish her creative abilities, she used it in such a way to bestow value on all those who influenced her writing by envisioning creativity as a communal and collective act. This perception of herself is evident in both her account of the creation of *Gösta Berling saga* in her essay, *En saga om en saga,* as well as in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, in which she represents the novel, and all of her literary creations, as the result of a collective effort on the behalf of all the stories she read and heard throughout her life, as well as some kind of sentient life force that exists in the stories themselves.

In her 1909 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Lagerlöf frames her creative abilities as collective endeavors by acknowledging the influence others had on the development of her creativity. The speech could be described as an ode to collective creativity—its central theme is the great debt Lagerlöf owes to all who made her writing possible, from her father, whom she credits with introducing her to Bellman's songs, and the literary works of Esaias Tegnér, Johan Ludvig Runeberg, and Hans Christian Andersen, but also, the more regional and folkloric influences of local oral traditions:

> Think how many creditors I have. Think of those poor, homeless vagabonds who used to travel up and down Värmland in your youth, playing the fool and singing

> all those songs. What do I not owe to them, to their mischief and mad pranks! And the old men and women sitting in their small grey cottages as one came out of the forest, telling me wonderful stories of water-sprites and trolls and enchanted maidens lured into the mountains. It was they who taught me that there is poetry in hard rocks and black forests.[13]

Acknowledging the debt she owes to those "vagabonds" and "old men and women" for teaching her about the importance of song and story, she also credits the natural world for providing the sources for her tales. She states this later in the speech: "And I am in debt not only to people; there is the whole of nature as well. The animals that walk the earth, the birds in the skies, the trees and flowers, they have all told me some of their secrets."[14] The importance of the natural world is another thread we can follow all through Lagerlöf's work, and as we can see here, it is deeply connected to the oral song and storytelling traditions Lagerlöf encountered in her childhood.

Not only did Lagerlöf characterize the creative process as a collective endeavor thanks to all who inspired her, she even viewed the story itself as an autonomous participant in the act of creation. In her 1911 essay about the origins of *Gösta Berlings saga*, Lagerlöf explicitly refers to it as a story that she did not invent, but that came to her of its own volition, after being retold by others many times before: "Once upon a time, there was a story that wanted to be told and to go out into the world. It was perfectly natural, because it knew that it was as good as finished. Many had helped to create it through remarkable events, others had made their way to it by telling it over and over again."[15] Her personification of the story as an entity that possesses a will of its own points to her understanding of the creative process as something that she, the storyteller,

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[13] Lagerlöf, "Banquet Speech," NobelPrize.org (Nobel Media AB, 2019).

[14] Lagerlöf, "Banquet Speech."

[15] Lagerlöf, "The Story of a Story," 7.

participates in alongside many others, rather than a process that she dominates, or over which she has complete control.

Therefore, rather than merely upholding the same misogynist binary categories employed by Heidenstam and Levertin, Lagerlöf's humble characterization of her own talents as communally oriented complicates the idea that a work of art is only worthy of recognition if it is the result of a single author. Instead, Lagerlöf's account of her creativity gives value to its collective origins thereby acknowledging that creativity is collective by nature, while also elevating the status of the humble folk tale in the eyes of official culture. Lagerlöf's depiction of creativity as a collaborative act parallels Macpherson's representation of the collective song of the bards in his poems and d'Aulnoy's elicitation of the conversational context of the salon in her tales.

Queer Collectivity and the Queer Narrative Voice in *Gösta Berlings saga*

Like d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and Macpherson's poems, Lagerlöf's debut novel, *Gösta Berlings saga,* is queer both for its supernatural content—in its depiction of a liminal and spiritually dynamic natural world—but also on a formal level, in the way it blends different styles, genres, and literary forms. The same hybridity that we saw in d'Aulnoy's merging of Italian literary fairy tales with French fables and Breton folklore, and Macpherson's combination of lyric and narrative elements in his prose-poems, can be seen in the way Lagerlöf brings together various literary traditions in *Gösta Berlings saga,* blending the Scandinavian saga, the medieval ballad, and the folktale within the novel. The novel's hybrid form has made it notoriously difficult for critics to define—it has been compared to opera, drama, and epic poetry. Elsa Olson-Buckner calls the novel

a “mosaic” that combines: “primitive legend, folktale, sacred myth, history, fantasy, local yarns, allegory, saga, and romance.”[16] One of the reasons for this generic hybridity is the fact that the project went through several stages, beginning as a set of verse “romances” in the style of Esaias Tegnér’s verse epic, *Frithiofs saga* (1825), and Johan Ludvig Runeberg’s epic poem, *Tales of Ensign Stål* (1848), then becoming a drama, before assuming its final form as a collection of short prose narratives fitted into the frame of a novel. [17] The novel retains the feeling of an epic poem, but is also reminiscent of the prose narratives of the Icelandic sagas to which its title alludes.

Similar to the way Macpherson’s *Ossian* poems exist at the interstices of a whole host of contradictions (between Gaelic and English, between oral and literary culture, between translation and ‘original’ work), *Gösta Berlings saga* also occupies an ambivalent or conflicted stance at the nexus of several opposing forces—between the real and the fantastic, between the individual and the collective, between order and chaos, and between good and evil—none of which are ever fully resolved by the novel’s conclusion. Lagerlöf herself reflected on her inability to take a clear stance in regards to the novel’s various contradictions in an 1892 letter to fellow author, Helena Nyblom: “I have sometimes felt it was an injustice or a shortcoming that I could not take sides, to almost equally like the opinions of both sides.”[18] The novel’s occupation of both sides of these various divides contributes to its queerness, as it allows for the existence of multiple conflicting readings simultaneously.

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[16] Olson-Buckner, *The Epic Tradition in Gösta Berlings Saga*, 4-7.
[17] Schoolfield, “Introduction,” x.
[18] Letter cited in Torpe, *Orden och jorden*, 39.

One of the tensions that *Gösta Berlings saga* investigates that it has in common with Macpherson's poems is its dual representation of the individual and the collective. Danish critic Henrik Wivel has described the novel as being comprised of "two constantly intertwining tracks, partly the individual," linked to the fate of the novel's central character, Gösta Berling, and "partly the collective, linked to the cavaliers and the fate of the entire Lövsjö district."[19] Set in the Swedish province of Värmland in the 1820s, Lagerlöf's novel follows the exploits of the young de-frocked minister, Gösta Berling, during the year he spends in the company of a wild band of cavaliers—retired soldiers who experienced glory in the Napoleonic wars. The cavaliers live off of the charity extended to them by a woman called the majoress, who owns and manages a profitable ironworks on the shores of Löven lake. Although the novel's central narrative concerns Gösta's fate, as Wivel points out, it is equally interested in representing the many lives that intersect with Gösta's over the course of the novel.

At the head of this merry band, Gösta is described by the narrator as the "cavalier of cavaliers, who all by himself was a greater orator, singer, musician, hunter, drinking champion, and player than all the others."[20] Gösta's oratory talents have earned him the nickname, "the poet," although he never writes verse.[21] In spite of his incredible oratory abilities, Gösta is thrown out of his parish at the beginning of the novel for his excessive drinking, and is then rescued from his miserable state of drunken homelessness by the majoress, who offers him a home with the cavaliers in the attic of her manor house, Ekeby. Gösta remains with the cavaliers for seven years, until one Christmas night, the

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[19] Wivel, *Snödrottningen,* 60.
[20] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 30.
[21] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 31.

devil comes to Ekeby and tells the cavaliers that the majoress has been buying her success with their souls—every year a cavalier must die to keep the ironworks profitable. To put a stop to this, the cavaliers make their own deal with the devil. They promise to take control of the ironworks and for a whole year they will do nothing that is unlike a cavalier. The next day, the majoress is driven out of Ekeby, and over the course of the following year the cavaliers let the estate and the surrounding countryside devolve into chaos and ruin. Most of the novel recounts what happens during this wild year. At the novel's conclusion, Gösta and the cavaliers renounce their reckless lifestyle and leave Ekeby, the majoress returns to die in peace in her former home, and order and prosperity return to the land.

Like the shape-shifting and liminal worlds depicted in d'Aulnoy's and Macpherson's texts that have their roots in folkloric sources, the supernatural universe of *Gösta Berlings saga* is informed by folkloric beliefs that envisioned a greater proximity between humans and the natural world. In Lagerlöf's case, her folkloric sources are the oral tales that circulated in Värmland in Lagerlöf's childhood.[22] Similar to the representation of the supernatural in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and Macpherson's poems, the supernatural in *Gösta Berlings saga* is critically linked to the natural world, in particular to the landscape where Lagerlöf grew up. In her 1933 essay, "Värmland's Natural Beauty," Lagerlöf characterizes the region as a borderland, not just between Norway and Sweden, but also where the boundaries between the real and the unreal, between the visible and the invisible, and between humans and nature are continually transgressed.[23]

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[22] See Erik Eliasson's study on the significance of oral tradition in Lagerlöf's writing in his "Selma Lagerlöf och folk-diktningen; några anteckningar," *Samlaren* 31 (1950): 50-86.
[23] Wivel, *Snödrottningen,* 60.

These various border-crossings can be seen in Lagerlöf's representation of the supernatural, which blends fantasy and reality in a style that some critics have described as a kind of magical realism.[24] Unlike d'Aulnoy's marvelous fairy tale universe in which the magic that exists is fully believed by the characters, in the world of Lagerlöf's novel we are never sure what is real and what is not, as the story moves continually between fantasy and reality. Both the characters in the novel, and the narrator herself, oscillate between doubt and belief in regard to the supernatural events that unfold over the course of the novel's thirty-six chapters. Indeed, the novel's defining event—the cavaliers' deal with the devil to take control of Ekeby—is ambiguously supernatural in character. It is never made clear whether the deal the cavaliers strike is with the malevolent mill owner Sintram, who is simply dressed as one of the devil's servants in a prank he arranged with Gösta, or with the devil himself. The supernatural events in the novel blur the distinctions between fantasy and reality, just as they also complicate the distinctions between humans and the natural world.

The book's supernatural and folkloric content, in combination with the unique style in which it is written, marked a departure from the realist fiction that dominated the literary scene in Sweden at the time it was published.[25] Swedish literary historian Alrik Gustafson characterizes the singular nature of the style of this novel, and Lagerlöf's writing in general, as follows:

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[24] Wivel, *Snödrottningen,* 61. "At the same time, the baroque extravagance makes *Gösta Berlings saga* an extremely modern novel, even so modern that one has to move far into our century, to Latin American writers such as Borges and García Márques and Europeans such as Marguerite Yourcenar, Karen Blixen and Michel Tournier, to find artists and critics who could fully appreciate the novel's magically ambiguous realism." (Translation is mine).

[25] For a brief overview of some of the major writers of the realistic and socially critical writing of the 1880s in Sweden, see Anna-Karin Palm, *Jag vill sätta världen i rörelse,* p. 8-10.

> It has nothing of the vaunted 'objectivity,' the factual sobriety, the stylistic impersonality, and little of the minute analysis of cause-and-effect relations which the 1880's sought to attain in prose fiction. Instead Selma Lagerlöf's prose tended to be unashamedly subjective, its characters are moved by impulse and by inner visions, its style often favors rhetorical effects and is loaded with personifications, hyperbole, exclamatory interjections, free rhythmic patterns.[26]

The features of the book identified by Gustafson here (such as the over-the-top emotions of the characters, the hyperbolic events in the novel, and its use of rhetorical effects), not only set Lagerlöf's writing apart from her contemporaries, they are precisely those features of the novel that resonate with similar stylistic features in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and Macpherson poems, and that I identify as aesthetically queer. My definition of queerness in this project refers to that which operates beyond, or outside of, binary thinking; its logic is of expansion, of infinite possibility. Therefore, queer aesthetics are those aesthetic characteristics that go beyond the boundaries and restrictions of what's considered stylistically reasonable, as well as those stylistic characteristics that emphasize emotions and foreground sensory experience. This is why the style of all three writers is characterized by excess, by being over the top, by exaggeration; why, as Maria Karlsson has shown, Selma Lagerlöf's writing is so profoundly melodramatic.[27] Described by critics as both "Baroque"[28] and "Neo-Romantic",[29] Lagerlöf's novel is recounted by a narrator whose heightened and emotional mode of apostrophic address echoes the melancholy and nostalgic tone of Macpherson's bardic narrator. The novel's love of excess and exquisite sensory detail shares a similar sensibility with the melodrama, excess, and extravagance in d'Aulnoy's detailed descriptions of her fairy tale

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[26] Gustafson, *A History of Swedish Literature*, 308.
[27] See Karlsson, *Känslans röst: Det melodramatiska I Selma Lagerlöfs romankonst*. Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 2002.
[28] Wivel, *Snödrottningen,* 60.
[29] Popp and Barksdale, "The Tale-Teller's Fugues," 406, 407.

universe. In its detailed rendering of the sensuality of the physical world, in its celebration of excess and pleasure, and in its foregrounding of heightened and intense emotion, *Gösta Berlings saga* enacts the same queer aesthetics that we saw in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and Macpherson's poems. These queer aesthetics are linked to the queer ontology that informs the entire work.

We can see this queer ontology take shape in the novel in three primary ways. The first is through the narrator, whose narrative voice I characterize as queer for the way it is able to express a constantly shifting identity and speak in many different voices, articulating a queer collectivity and multiplicity. The narrator is also able to circumvent linear time in the way she moves between past, present, and future, enacting a cyclical model of time similar to what we saw in *The Works of Ossian*. The second representation of the novel's queer ontology can be seen in the queer kinship of the pleasure-seeking cavaliers, who live together in a homosocial community under the auspices of the powerful majoress, who presides over them as their gender-bending king. The cavaliers' sworn vow to never work or earn money sets them up on the fringes of society as eccentric, but endearing, failures of a heteronormative lifestyle. The cavaliers' commitment to a life of hedonistic pleasure shares resonances with the foregrounding of beauty and sensory delight in many of d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, particularly in "La Chatte Blanche." The third and final aspect of the novel's queerness is its representation of the spiritual presence that resides in the natural (and physical) world, which is made apparent to us through the narrator, but also, through the novel's depiction of the supernatural. Like the liminal Celtic landscape of Macpherson's poems, in its depiction of the living natural landscape of Swedish lakes and forests, the novel posits that there is no hard

distinction between the spiritual and the material world. Like the dead sister's spirit that still lives within her bones in "The Twa Sisters," Lagerlöf's novel teaches us that "the spirit of life still lives in dead things."[30] Through Lagerlöf's writing, we learn how profoundly all objects in the material world are imbued with spiritual life, as well as the inverse—how physical and material the spirit world can be if we simply look closer at the world around us.

It is thanks in large part to the narrator at the center of *Gösta Berlings saga* that we gain access to this queer way of viewing and understanding the world. Like the blind, bardic figure of Ossian who acts as the medium at the center of Macpherson's poems through which the liminal spirit world of the Celtic Highlands is transmitted, so Lagerlöf's narrator stands at the heart of the novel, bringing Värmland's oral storytelling past into the nineteenth-century world of the printed story. Although the novel's overarching plot deals with the year the cavaliers drive the majoress out of Ekeby, woven throughout are the histories of the novel's cast of supporting characters, recounted to us by the narrator, who takes us with her back in time as she relates stories from each character's past. Thus, time in the novel is not strictly linear but moves in fits and starts along the dominant narrative in a similar way to how time is depicted in Macpherson's poems. Like Ossian, who serves as the organizing principle around which the narrative is structured, the voice of Lagerlöf's storyteller-narrator guides the reader through the events of the novel.

In the same way that Macpherson created a new kind of orality within a literary context by using Ossian to represent his idealized view of the oral poetic tradition of the

[30] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 311.

Highland bards, Lagerlöf recreates her idealized view of the storytelling traditions from her childhood within the context of the novel through the figure of the narrator. The narrator asserts her presence in the story often, in her use of the first-person pronoun, and in her frequent use of apostrophe, which helps to create the illusion of a storyteller speaking to the reader. Apostrophe as a device draws our attention to the act of speaking as it invokes the situation of a speaker and a listener. Therefore, Lagerlöf's use of apostrophe is instrumental for her creation of an oral storytelling situation in the novel. We can see an example of how the narrator uses the first-person pronoun in combination with apostrophic address to evoke an oral storytelling situation in the chapter titled, "Ghost Stories." The chapter begins with an address to the children of days to come and refers directly to the storytelling tradition:

> Oh, latter-day children!
>
> I have nothing new to tell you, only what is old and almost forgotten. Legends I have from the nursery, where the little ones sat on low stools around the storyteller with the white hair, or from the log fire in the cabin, where farmhands and crofters sat and talked, as steam rose from their wet clothes and they pulled knives from leather sheaths at their necks to spread butter onto thick, soft bread, or from the parlor, where old gentlemen sat in rocking chairs, enlivened by a steaming toddy, talked of bygone times.[31]

Like d'Aulnoy's invocation of the oral setting of the salon in her direct asides to her reader, in this passage, the narrator establishes herself as our storyteller by referring to herself in the first person and describing her own memories of an oral tale-telling scene from her childhood. Her tone of nostalgia is evident in the sensory details she relates from this cozy domestic scene, in the old gentlemen who sat and "talked of bygone times," as well as her remark that what she has to tell is "only what is old and almost

[31] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 160.

forgotten." Like the figure of Ossian, whose poetic abilities, in combination with his extreme old age, make him the repository of living memory for all of his ancestors, the narrator's mention of "the white hair" of the storyteller establishes the same tradition here, in which older generations pass their stories onto younger generations. By addressing her remarks to "latter-day children", our storyteller-narrator makes clear that she is participating in this same tradition, albeit in the literary context of the novel instead of by the fireside.

As a rhetorical device, apostrophe is typically associated with the lyric poem.[32] Lagerlöf's use of it within the narrative context of the novel is yet another way she blends opposing literary forms in *Gösta Berlings saga* to create a hybrid text (hybrid in the sense that it combines elements from both poetry and prose) that is similar to the formal hybridity I identified in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and Macpherson's prose-poems. By alluding simultaneously to its status as a written text and its indebtedness to an oral storytelling tradition, *Gösta Berlings saga* complicates the distinction between speech and writing, showing how orality can exist in unique ways within a literary context. We can see an example of this in the novel's seventh chapter, "The Old Conveyances," in which the narrator begins the chapter with an apostrophic address to the reader:

> Friends, children of humankind! If you should find yourselves reading this at night, whether sitting or lying down, just as I am writing this during the silent hours, then you must not heave a sigh of relief here and think that the good gentlemen cavaliers of Ekeby were allowed an undisturbed sleep, after they had come home with Marianne and found her a good bed in the best guest room next to the large parlor.[33]

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[32] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 137.
[33] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 84.

Here, by speaking directly to the reader, Lagerlöf simulates the oral tradition of storytelling, in which there was a direct exchange between speaker and listener. While drawing attention to an oral tradition through the use of apostrophe, the narrator also simultaneously acknowledges the novel's status as a written text by referring to her act of *writing* the story and the reader's act of *reading* it. Although reader and writer are experiencing the story in different times and spaces, the narrator still manages to create a situation of involvement between herself and the reader through her use of direct address, even telling the reader how to react. What this dual awareness of both its oral and literary elements reveals is that the novel complicates the generic distinction between oral and literary culture, just as it complicates the divide between poetry and prose in its use of both lyric and narrative elements.

In addition to demonstrating the novel's formal hybridity, the presence of the narrator is also what enables Lagerlöf to illustrate the collective nature of her creative practice as the narrator often speaks in the voices of other characters in a similar way to how the voices of the dead speak through Ossian in Macpherson's poems. Although I use the pronouns "she/her" to refer to the narrator in this chapter, Lagerlöf's narrator is never gendered. Though she often speaks of her memories, thoughts, and emotions, we are given no real identifying information about her—her identity remains ambiguous. Because of the lack of identifying gender, and especially because of the narrator's capacity to shift throughout the novel, I suggest that this is a queer narrative voice, in that it contains multiple identities, desires, and personalities that are constantly in flux, and is thus able to a range of different voices—both human and non-human. At times, Lagerlöf's narrator seems to maintain a consistent identity, as a kind of omniscient

storyteller figure much like Ossian in his role as prophetic bard, speaking with longing about the people and places from a bygone era; however, at other times, the narrator's identity seems to shift. Although Lagerlöf's narrator does not demonstrate the same overtly supernatural abilities as Ossian (i.e. she is not literally speaking to ghosts), there is still a kind of spiritual possession that takes place when other voices speak through her. Like Ossian, she also has special access to the supernatural world, evidenced by the fact that she sometimes speaks in the voices of supernatural or non-human entities such as bears, witches, forest nymphs, and even sometimes the landscape itself—including lakes, rivers, forests, plains, and hills.

Another queer aspect of the narrator's presence is the way she is able to disrupt a sense of linear, or progress-oriented time. Instead of having a reproductive focus on the future, the narrator's gaze is oriented towards the past and time in the novel is structured around re-living old memories and on the nostalgic pleasure those memories evoke. Similar to the way Ossian's conversations with the ghosts in Macpherson's poems present a cyclical understanding of time by enabling the voices of the dead to speak to those in the present about the future, the narrator's use of apostrophe in *Gösta Berling saga* helps to make these jumps in time possible, as apostrophe enacts an alternative mode of temporality by creating moments of temporal stillness in the text which arrest the flow of the narrative. In the midst of recounting a scene from the past, the narrator will stop and directly address the reader or one of the characters in the story, referring to a future beyond the events she is relating, making us aware that she is speaking to us from a place outside of time. Time in the novel thus gains the appearance of being

layered, or stacked, as events from different moments in time seem to occur simultaneously.

We can see an example of how the narrator conveys this cyclical notion of time in the chapter, "Christmas Night," in the way that she moves fluidly between the past and the present through her apostrophic speech. The chapter begins with a sense of immediacy as the narrator speaks directly to the characters in the scene: "Pull the big wood sledge into the smithy, let it stand in the middle of the floor, and lay a cart bed over the stakes! Now we have a table. Cheers for the table, the table is ready! Bring out chairs, anything that can be used to sit on! […] Hurrah! Hurrah! It is Christmas night at the Ekeby ironworks."[34] The narrator's use of apostrophe and the fact that she speaks in present tense makes it seem as though the story is happening at the very moment it's being told, drawing the reader into the scene by evoking a sense of involvement. Here we can also see evidence of the narrator's constantly shifting identity. In this moment, she appears to be speaking in the voice of one of the cavaliers, directing his companion as he readies the smithy for the Christmas celebrations.

However, in the midst of this lively account, the narrator interrupts her own ecstatic description of the cavaliers' preparations to tell us that these events happened in the past, speaking suddenly in a different voice, and addressing the reader instead of a fellow character in the scene: "For many years now the cavaliers' wing has stood empty. Ekeby is no longer the chosen refuge of homeless cavaliers. Retired officers and poor nobles no longer drift around Värmland in rickety one-horse carriages. But let the dead

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[34] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 27-28.

live, let them rise again, those happy, carefree, eternally young ones!"[35] In the narrator's command to "let the dead live" we can identify the power in the narrator's words, like the supernatural power of Ossian's ghost-summoning harp. The cavaliers *do* live again through the narrator's lively descriptions, and also in the way time is collapsed through the narrator's presence so that the past and the present occur simultaneously in the space of her narration. The cavaliers are summoned back to life through the narrator's use of apostrophic address, much in the same way that Ossian conjures up the spirits of the dead through his song. Also expressed by the narrator here is a deeply nostalgic view of the past and a longing for its return similar to what we saw in Macpherson's poems. The narrator's ecstatic characterization of the cavaliers as those "happy, carefree, eternally young ones!" portrays them in the kind of celebratory way that is typical of elegiac address, and also consistent with the Romantic style that Lagerlöf employs throughout the novel.

Like Ossian's mournful addresses to his dead loved ones in *The Works of Ossian*, in many of the instances of apostrophe in *Gösta Berlings saga*, we can see evidence of the narrator's nostalgia and longing for the past. In addition to speaking from a future when the cavaliers are long dead, she also frequently jumps back in time before the cavaliers lived at Ekeby to recount various moments from their past, enabling them to relive the joys of their youth through the narrator's words to them. In one such instance, Lilliecrona, the talented fiddle-playing cavalier, plays "La Cachucha" over and over again in the twilight of the cavaliers' wing. The narrator addresses Lilliecrona directly, begging him to stop tormenting the old lieutenant Örneclou with memories, with the

[35] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 29.

reality that he can no longer dance as he did in his youth because of his gout-riddled limbs:

> Cruelest of men, are you sounding the attack for a tethered warhorse? Rutger von Örneclou is lying in his bed, imprisoned by gout pains. Spare him the torment of sweet memories, maestro! He too has worn a sombrero and a gaudy hairnet, he too has owned a velvet jacket and a sash with a dagger tucked in it. Spare old Örnelcou, maestro![36]

The same tone of longing for the past that pervades Ossian's ghostly encounters is evident here in Örneclou's bitter sorrow over the fact that he cannot dance the way he used to. But Lilliecrona does not stop playing the song, and the effect is that Örneclou *does* remember the girl from his past; he remembers how well he used to dance *la cachucha* in his youth as he is transported back to the past via the music of Lilliecrona's violin and the words of the narrator.

Music acts as a conduit to the past in this scene as it is the music of Lilliecrona's violin that enables Örneclou to experience his memories again. In the midst of her description of the scene, the narrator switches tenses from past to present to convey Örneclou's experience of traveling back in time, switching also from third to second person in order to address the beautiful dancing young couple:

> Then Lilliecrona again starts *la cachucha,* always *la cachucha,* and Örneclou is carried back to old times.
>
> There he stands, and there she stands, Rosalie von Berger. They had just been alone together in the changing room. She was a Spaniard, he a Spaniard. He was allowed to kiss her, but carefully, for she was afraid of his blackened moustaches. Now they are dancing. Ah, the way you dance under fig trees and plane trees: she gives way, he follows, he becomes bold, she proud, he wounded, she conciliatory. When at last he falls to his knees and receives her in his outstretched arms, a sigh passes through the ballroom, a sigh of rapture.[37]

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[36] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 62.
[37] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 64.

The narrator's shift to present tense creates the impression that she too has been transported by the music to the very moment in time she is describing. Her abrupt shift in address as she watches the dancing couple suggests that she is watching them dance before her eyes, and that she is so moved, she cannot help but speak to them directly. She is as overcome with their beauty as if she was actually there watching them. This temporal shift, and the narrator's change in address, is reminiscent of Ossian's apostrophic declarations to the ghosts he summons with the music of his harp. Though the instrument's conjuring of the past may not be as deliberately supernatural as it is in Macpherson's poems, it is music that enables Örneclou to travel back in time, and it is thanks to the narrator's presence that we are able to experience this memory as though it is happening in real time. Time in the novel is therefore not linear, but rather cyclical, as events from the past return and are experienced again. This cyclical time is queer in the sense that it is not developmental or progress-oriented, but is rather focused on the nostalgic pleasure that is experienced from re-living old memories, just as we saw in Ossian's indulgence in the melancholy memories of his dead loved ones.

In addition to her representation of non-linear time, the narrator's queerness can also be seen in the way her identity shifts—often multiple times in the midst of a single scene—enabling her to speak in other voices. The narrator's constantly shifting and transforming identity is evidence of what I refer to as a queer narrative voice because it is not fixed and settled, changing so frequently that it can sometimes be impossible to identify who is speaking from one moment to the next. This creates the possibility for us as readers to experience multiple points of view almost simultaneously, along with the corresponding thoughts and emotions of these different perspectives. This multiplicity of

identity therefore also creates a multiplicity of desires, shifting as the narrator's identity shifts. We can see an example of the shifting desires of this queer narrative voice in the chapter, "The Ball at Ekeby," in the way the narrator expresses desire for the women she's speaking to, and also, in the way the narrative voice shifts several times in the space of a single chapter. The chapter tells of a magnificent ball hosted by the cavaliers and of the passionate kiss shared by Gösta Berling and the beautiful Marianne Sinclaire, when they are swept away by the beauty of the moment and their desire for one another while acting together in a tableau as part of the evening's entertainment (he, in the role of Don Juan, she, as a beautiful *señorita*). The chapter begins in an ecstatic mode of apostrophic address to the women in the novel:

> Oh, women of bygone ages!
>
> To speak of you is like speaking of heaven: you were pure beauty, pure light. Eternally youthful, eternally lovely and tender as a mother's eyes, when she looks down at her child. Soft as young squirrels you curled around a man's neck. Never did your voices quiver with rage, never did your brows furrow, never did your gentle hands become rough and hard. Sweet vestals, you stood like jeweled images in the temple of the home. Incense and prayers were offered to you, through you love performed its miracles, and poetry affixed a gold-gleaming halo around your head.
>
> Oh, women of bygone ages, this is the story of how yet another one of you gave Gösta Berling her love. [38]

The narrator's tone here is reverential, celebratory, and full of admiration. In recognizing the beauty of these women, we can detect the desire in her praise. As is often the case when the narrator speaks, it's not clear exactly *who* is speaking; however, later in the chapter, when Gösta Berling gives a speech at the end of the Ball, we hear him repeat the narrator's words from the beginning of the chapter, the only difference being that he does

[38] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 66.

not address them as "women of bygone ages." The narrator introduces the scene as follows: "Then Gösta tapped on the edge of the bowl and gave a speech for you, women of bygone ages…"[39] clearly differentiating her voice, from Gösta's voice as he repeats the words of her speech.

Who, then, is speaking at the beginning of the chapter? Is it our storyteller-narrator repeating Gösta's poetic praise in honor of these remarkable women? Or is it Gösta himself, speaking from some future after the novel's conclusion? If the narrator *is* Gösta speaking at the beginning of the chapter, then the narrator's identity changes partway through the chapter to someone else entirely, evidenced by the following passage, when the beautiful Marianne Sinclair is at risk of freezing to death after being locked outside by her angry father for kissing Gösta Berling. In this moment, the narrator directs her address to Death himself, and in doing so, seems to take on the voice of a simple hard-working peasant:

> Oh Death, pale friend, is it not as true as it is consoling, that I can never avoid meeting you? Even to me, the dullest of the world's workers, you will come, loosen the worn leather shoe from my foot, tug the whisk and the milk pail from my hand, remove the work clothes from my body. With gentle force you stretch me out on a lace-adorned bed, you adorn me with draping full-length linens. My feet no longer need shoes, but my hands are covered with snow-white gloves that no tasks will soil. Sanctified by you to the sweetness of rest, I sleep a thousand-year sleep. Oh redeemer! The dullest of the world's workers am I, and I dream with a shiver of pleasure of that moment when I will be taken up into your kingdom.
>
> Pale friend, you may freely exercise your force against me, but I will tell you this: your struggle was harder with the women of bygone ages. The power of life was strong in their slender bodies; no cold could cool their hot blood.[40]

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[39] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 80.
[40] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 79-80.

Although we are given a few details about the speaker here when they describe themselves as "the dullest of the world's workers"—that they wear worn leather shoes, that they often carried a milk pail, and held a whisk—we still do not know the gender of this speaker. We know, however, that this is the same reverential voice from the beginning of the chapter because the person speaking refers again here to the "women of bygone ages" who they have addressed throughout the chapter, and in praising their strength, "the power of life" "in their slender bodies" we can identify the same tone of adoration from the beginning of the chapter. The shifting identity of the narrator makes the expression of their adoration for the "women of bygone ages" a queer form of desire—queer because the gender of the speaker is irrelevant here; what matters is the admiration they feel about these beautiful women from the past.

The narrator's expression of poetic admiration for the women of bygone ages is queer for another reason as well: the fact that her reverent speech echoes exactly the words spoken by the dashing young cavalier, Gösta Berling, establishes an identification between the narrator and Gösta as a lover of beautiful women. Of the many shifting facets of the narrator's identity, there is one version that could be said to represent a fictionalized version of Lagerlöf herself. Although she never genders herself, it's easy to imagine the storyteller's speaking voice as a female speaking voice. In that case, we can identify the narrator's adoration for the women in this chapter as queer because the speaker is a woman expressing admiration and desire for other women. The female narrator's identification with Gösta Berling becomes especially queer if we consider the way Lagerlöf uses the character of Gösta Berling to represent the erotic and to give voice to an appreciation of sensuality and pleasure. In the tableau scene in "The Ball at Ekeby,"

Gösta is cast in the role of the seducer-figure Don Juan. In this scene, Don Juan, disguised as a monk, stops beneath the balcony of a beautiful Spanish woman, played by Marianne Sinclaire. After professing that he will abstain from kissing beautiful mouths, and inspiring passionate blushes in pale cheeks, he casts away his disguise, climbs up the balcony, and throws himself to his knees before his beloved. There, the tableau is meant to end; however, Marianne finds herself so taken with the man kneeling before her, "his face pliant as a poet's and bold as a commander's, with deep eyes, glistening with roguishness and genius" that she leans down and kisses him.[41] Here, Gösta's own seductive abilities mirror the seductive force of the character he is meant to play. Similar scenes happen throughout the novel, where women fall wildly in love with Gösta Berling within the span of single chapter. It is also no coincidence that Gösta's horse is called Don Juan.

The figure of Don Juan exerts a certain sensual significance in Lagerlöf's writing.[42] Like the character of Gösta Berling, Lagerlöf uses the figure of Don Juan to write about sensuality and sexual love. In a poem written by the author before the publication of the novel, titled "Don J.," an ambiguously gendered poetic "I" speaks to a female "you," in a passionate articulation of how the desire between the two speakers "cannot be satisfied with words and caresses" but can "only be satisfied in kisses."[43] The poem explores the seductive power that the speaker has over the "you," detailing how their first kiss happened when: "you came shyly towards me you/ irresistibly drawn by

[41] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 70.

[42] For an excellent overview of Lagerlöf's first experiences with Don Juan in Mozart's opera in a production she saw in Stockholm, see Ulla-Britta Lagerroth and Lisbeth Stenberg's *Selma Lagerlöfs Teatersonetter* (Lettland: Ellerströms, 2014), 56-62.

[43] Stenberg, *En genialisk lek,* 119.

my magic power," and describing how: "I alone have understood/ how to compel you to love me/ I alone have managed it."[44] As Lisbeth Stenberg has remarked, sight in the poem is highlighted as a sign of an inner exchange of power in love: "In the glow of the eyes as well as in the kisses a hot desire is realized."[45] These descriptions in the poem mirror what happens between Gösta and Marianne in the tableau scene. It is when she looks in Gösta's eyes "that begged and coaxed," that Marianne is moved to kiss him.[46] She is drawn by the seductive power in his gaze, just like the "you" is drawn to the "I" in the poem after being the object of "the stream of fire" in their look.[47] The singular nature of the "I"'s power over the "you" also parallels Marianne's love for Gösta; she falls in love with Gösta after the narrator tells us: "She herself had often loved—often, often—but never had such a fire of desire lasted long enough so that the shackles that bind for life could be forged."[48] It is Gösta Berling alone who has the ability to win Marianne's love.

This poem demonstrates not only Lagerlöf's interest in the role sensuality has to play in love (here the lovers' relationship depends on it) but we can also see the same queer narrative voice at work in the poem that exists in *Gösta Berlings saga*, as the poetic speaker's gender is never identified. As Stenberg notes, "the poetic self is marked in the center as the one who takes initiative and controls the action," so in that sense it could well be a masculine "Don Juan" speaking to a female lover. "Don J." could therefore be what Stenberg refers to as a "roll poem," in which Lagerlöf speaks in the voice of the

[44] Stenberg, *En genialisk lek,* 118.
[45] Stenberg, *En genialisk lek,* 118.
[46] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 70.
[47] Stenberg, *En genialisk lek,* 118.
[48] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 68.

famous libertine to explore the relationship between desire and power. However, there is also the possibility that the speaker in the poem is a woman speaking to a female lover. According to Stenberg, "Don J." is but one of a group of love poems Lagerlöf wrote in this period "characterized by a clear poetic 'I' that expresses a strong sensual experience."[49] Therefore, Lagerlöf's decision to *speak* in the voice of Don Juan could also result from her own identification with this figure. In a letter to her friend Matilda Widegren from this period, Lagerlöf describes her difficulties with jealousy in several of her intimate female friendships, writing that things would be easier if she did not have "a Don Juan nature."[50] As Anna Nordlund points out in *Selma Lagerlöf: Sveriges Modernaste Kvinna*, (*Selma Lagerlöf: Sweden's Most Modern Woman*), Lagerlöf was the object of affection of several of the women at the school where she worked, and the conflicting feelings for her new friends, "the delight and jealousy she aroused in them [...] led her poetry in a new direction with self-confession and problem-oriented thought poems and sensual love lyrics of a dreamy nature."[51] Nordlund clearly identifies "Don J." as a poem that is rooted in Lagerlöf's own experiences with sensual love. Therefore, we can see how Don Juan functions as a figure signifying the sensual aspects of romantic love in Lagerlöf's sexual imagination. His dual associations with the character of Gösta Berling, and with Lagerlöf's own erotic and romantic life, thus establishes an identification between Lagerlöf and Gösta as a seducer of beautiful women. So when the narrator speaks to the beautiful women of bygone ages, we can hear both the voice of Gösta Berling (in his speech at the punch bowl), but also the voice of Lagerlöf as our

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[49] Stenberg, *En genialisk lek,* 123.

[50] As cited in Anna Nordlund's *Selma Lagerlöf: Sveriges Modernaste Kvinna* (Bokförlaget Max Ström, 2018) Lagerlöf writes: "Jag grälar på mig själf det är tråkigt att vara en Don Juan natur," p. 80.

[51] Nordlund, *Sveriges Modernaste Kvinna*, 80.

fictionalized female author. In this layering of multiple identities into one speaking voice, we can see the way that both identity, but also, desire in the novel proliferate and multiply through the shifting figure of the narrator.

Gösta Berlings saga's celebratory depiction of sensual love and its foregrounding of material pleasures echoes the same reverent depictions of the material world we saw in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, in the erotic descriptions of figures like the White Cat and the Ram, whose sensual animal bodies illustrate the ways in which beauty, and the pleasure it evokes, are not restricted to a single gender, nor indeed to the category of the human. In a similar way, *Gösta Berlings saga* also complicates the stereotypical traits associated with each gender in its depiction of the powerful, hard-working majoress—who possesses both feminine and masculine qualities in equal measure—and the useless, pleasure-seeking cavaliers, who simultaneously represent a decadent model of failed patriarchal masculinity, but who the narrator also celebrates for their commitment to a life dedicated to pleasure and beauty. Like Gösta, who represents both the beautiful and the destructive capacities of sensual love, the cavaliers represent the struggle between order and chaos, illustrating the joy that can come from a life devoted to art and beauty, but also its consuming and destructive side. Although the cavaliers are forced to give up their hedonistic ways at the novel's conclusion, their wild and adventure-loving actions throughout the novel provide the narrator with a chance to sing the praises of excess, pleasure, and the sensory delights of the material world. In a similar way to how d'Aulnoy's depictions of the sensual bodies of her male characters queer the assumption that men are strictly rational beings and women are defined by their bodies, the fact that Lagerlöf uses male characters to represent a love of excess and pleasure, and female

characters to represent good sense and hard work queers the gendered expectation that men are practical and hardworking, and women are frivolous and incapable of reason.

The celebration of pleasure and indulgence in the cavaliers' decadent lifestyle resonates with the sensory and pleasure-focused descriptions of transformed animals and their enchanted surroundings in d'Aulnoy's fairy tale worlds; however, there is also a parallel in the homosocial community of the cavaliers with the moments of homoerotic connection experienced between Ossian and his dead male friends in the ghostly invocations in Macpherson's poems. The community in which the cavaliers live enacts a kind of queer kinship since they are a band of twelve mostly elderly men living together without wives and children. They are materially and financially supported by a powerful woman who enables them to live together without working. Here, the traditional gender roles are reversed. It is the majoress who is the breadwinner, who sees to it that the work on her estates is carried out and carried out correctly—while the cavaliers, useless as butterflies, drink and carry on in the attic of her profitable ironworks. She is tough, hard-working, and masculine in her attributes, as is evident in the following description:

> A stern, capable woman she is, the majoress at Ekeby. She lifts a bushel of rye onto her broad shoulders. She follows the transport of ore, gathered from the mining fields of Bergslagen, on the long road to Ekeby. She sleeps like a peasant driver on the floor of the barn with a sack as a pillow. In winter she may keep watch over a charcoal stack, in summer follow a raft of logs down Löven. She is a commanding woman. She swears like a street urchin and governs her seven ironworks and her neighborhoods' farms like a king, governs her own parish and the neighboring parishes, yes, the whole of beautiful Värmland. But for homeless cavaliers she has been like a mother… [52]

For as many strong and traditionally masculine characteristics she displays, she is equally feminine—not only because of the motherly way she looks after the cavaliers, but also,

[52] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 59.

because she can perform femininity, as we can see from this description of her at the Christmas banquet at Ekeby: "She presides as hostess at a table set for fifty guests. She sits there in brilliance and splendor; the short sheepskin, striped woolen stockings, and chalk pipe are nowhere to be seen. She rustles in silk, gold weighs down her bare arms, pearls cool her white neck." [53] From a gender perspective, the majoress is a rich and complicated character who reveals the failure of binary thinking when it comes to understanding her gender. Like d'Aulnoy's White Cat, who though she is a cat and a woman is both beautiful *and* powerful, Lagerlöf's majoress is strong and competent, incredibly powerful, referred to as a king, but also has a womanly side. She is referred to as a mother to the cavaliers and is revealed to be such an effective leader because of the great care she takes in looking after those under her rule.

In its presentation of the majoress as one of its strongest and most capable characters, the novel equates female characters with strength, good sense, and reason, while the cavaliers (and other male characters) are shown to be frivolous, self-involved and weak. Many scholars of the novel have pointed out how, at least on one level, the cavaliers represent a failing and outdated model of patriarchal masculinity. As Ulla Torpe writes: "In the first fifty pages of *Gösta Berlings saga,* Lagerlöf gives us very definitive information (in all its ambiguity) about a rotten, disintegrating, patriarchal system and its destructive effect on the female caring and working principle."[54] This interpretation is confirmed by the chaos and destruction that erupts during the year that the cavaliers rule

[53] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 39.
[54] Torpe, *Orden och jorden,* 39.

Ekeby. The chaos that the cavaliers unleash is made clear by the narrator throughout the novel:

> Then a way of life began there, which had never been worse. A storm passed over the land: all old folly broke out in the delirium of youth, all that was evil started moving, all good trembled, the people fought on the earth and the spirits in the heavens. Wolves came from Dovre with troll hags on their backs, natural forces were set free, and the wood nymph came to Ekeby.[55]

This core conflict of the novel—between the forces of chaos and order—are personified in the figures of Gösta Berling and the majoress. Kerstin Ekman has written that the whole novel is constructed around the tension between the two principles that Gösta Berling and the majoress represent: "the life-giving, principle of care, which can seem so stingy and harsh at times, and the destructive principle of consumption which seems to give life shine and meaning."[56] Like the cavaliers, Gösta's ambiguity lies in the questionable nature of his character. Clearly beloved by the narrator, who at times describes him as radiantly beautiful and brilliant, he is at other times represented as utterly despicable—stealing from a child to buy liquor, lying to a pious young girl about his past as a de-frocked minister so that he can marry her, playing a prank on his drunken friend which leads to that man's exile. Gösta himself is keenly aware of his various failings and tries to kill himself both at the novel's beginning and at the novel's conclusion. It is the majoress who saves Gösta from killing himself at the beginning of the novel, and she is credited several times as being responsible for the making of Gösta Berling. Gösta is saved from a second suicide attempt by another strong female character, his wife, the countess Elisabet. Thus, the story is framed by Gösta's self-pitying attempts

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[55] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 357.
[56] Torpe, *Orden och jorden,* 39.

to take his own life, and it is only because of the strong women around him that Gösta is pulled back from the brink of self-destruction.

While on one level the cavaliers clearly represent the chaos and destruction that can result from their hedonistic lifestyle, their presence in the novel also provides a way for the narrator to celebrate this kind of indulgence, of living a life dedicated to art and beauty, and all of the sensory pleasures that go along with it. Never working, the cavaliers live like Peter Pan's lost boys in a homosocial community devoted to a life of idleness—dancing, playing cards, hunting, and drinking—surviving on the generosity of the clever and hard-working majoress. In one of Gösta's stirring speeches, he relates what it means to be a cavalier:

> You are the ones who uphold pleasure in Värmland. You are the ones who put the strings in motion, keep the dance going, let song and play resound through the land. You know to keep your hearts away from gold, your hands from work. If you did not exist, then the dance would die out, summer would die out, the roses die out, card playing die out, song die out, and in all of this blessed land there would be nothing but iron and mill owners. Pleasure will live as long as you do.[57]

According to Gösta, without the cavaliers, Värmland would become a kind of capitalistic wasteland, where profit would rule instead of pleasure. Their dedication to a life of entertainment and beauty keeps away the dull order of reality—of work, of the bourgeoisie, and the family. In their hedonistic tendencies and foregrounding of pleasure, the cavaliers' lifestyle contains echoes of the utopian jouissance that queer theorists like Lee Edelman (2005), Samuel Delaney (2001), and Leo Bersani (2009) have identified in male homosexual sex and communities—especially in the way that queer lives are not shaped around a future that's determined by having children. Another key aspect of the

[57] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 31.

cavaliers' way of life is that they must die before old age ruins their ability to enjoy the pleasures of living: "If our trembling hands cannot lift the glass, our dimming eyes not discern the cards, what then is life to us, and what are we to life?"[58] Thus, the queerness of the cavaliers is related to their insistence on living life in the present, rather than depending on future generations to give their lives value. In this way, their lives are structured by queer time.

The cavaliers can be read as queer characters both for the way they represent beauty and dedication to pleasure, but also in the way they live without any thought of the future. Their focus on the present moment, and the pleasures it provides, means that the cavaliers live according to queer time. In the introduction to their book, *Queer Times, Queer Becomings,* editors E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, propose that "queer time" is the time experienced by those living "off the designated biopolitical schedule of reproductive heterosexuality."[59] They point out how "in Western discourses, queerness has been characterized by a lack of proper orientation in terms of time as much as social norms."[60] Citing Lee Edelman's concept of "reproductive futurism," they point out how queerness has frequently been defined in Western culture as failure to develop at the proper time: "And who, developmentally speaking, are younger at heart than queers, who in the homophobic imagination are retarded at the irresponsible age of youthful dalliances, refusing to grow up, settle down, and start a family?"[61] By this definition, no

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[58] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 30.
[59] McCallum and Tuhkanen, *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, 60.
[60] McCallum and Tuhkanen, *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, 60.
[61] McCallum and Tuhkanen, *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, 60.

one is queerer than Lagerlöf's band of job-less, family-less cavaliers, who live together in queer community in the attic of the manor house, Ekeby.

Like Macpherson's Ossian who looks constantly to the past to give meaning to his lonely existence, indulging in the pleasure of melancholy memories, the cavaliers also often look to the past as a source of pleasure—to their many youthful dalliances and wild adventures, as we saw earlier in Örneclou's memory of dancing la cachucha. Nine of the twelve cavaliers have their own chapter in the novel, detailing their exploits, their lost loves, their failed inventions, their never completed great works of art—all that they achieved and failed to achieve before they came to live in the majoress' attic. Like Ossian's celebrated comrades, six of the cavaliers are former military men; also, like Ossian's comrades, the cavaliers' days of glory are behind them. Like Ossian and his men, the cavaliers are musicians as well as warriors. As the narrator tells us: "All of these celebrated men can play one or more instruments."[62] They are the men that legends are made of even if they are old now and perhaps a bit decrepit, as Gösta relates in another speech, whose mythic language echoes the same ecstatic notes of praise in Ossian's memorial poems:

> …we are the poem's ancient band of twelve that proceeds through the ages. There were twelve of us, when we ruled the world on the cloud-covered top of Olympus, and twelve when we lived as birds in Ygdrasil's green crown. Wherever poetry went forth, there we followed. Did we not sit, twelve men strong, at King Arthur's round table, and did twelve paladins not go in Charles the Twelfth's great army? One of us has been Thor, another Jupiter, as any man should be able to see in us yet today. The divine splendor can be sensed under the rags, the lion's mane under the donkey hide. Time has treated us badly, but when we are there, the smithy becomes a Mount Olympus and the cavaliers' wing a Valhalla. [63]

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[62] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 29.
[63] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 33.

Gösta's speech here alludes to the ambivalence at the heart of the cavaliers' existence—are these men truly great warriors who deserve to be treated like fallen gods? Or are they simply sad old soldiers who no longer have a purpose? For all of the narrator's ecstatic, praise-filled speeches to the cavaliers, there is also a parodic undercurrent present throughout the novel which reveals the shimmering appeal of the cavaliers' lifestyle to be a façade covering their shabby and pathetic reality. We can detect a note of it in Gösta's allusion to the splendor hidden beneath the donkey hide and rags, and it shows up throughout the novel in scenes where the cavaliers' greatness is always undercut and put in question. Henrik Wivel has described the cavaliers as empty signifiers, a purely surface phenomenon lacking meaning: "They are Romanticism's lost children, men of a bygone era, who now in Ekeby's temporary exile live on the memories of what once was but is no longer, other than as actions emptied of all functions except to keep the memories alive."[64] Like Ossian living for the memories of his celebrated warrior friends, the cavaliers are sustained in their old age by the shining memories of their youth. If Ossian comes from an era when magic was a part of everyday reality, the cavaliers are remnants of the Romantic era, in which science has introduced skepticism, but there are those who still want to believe in fantasy. As Romanticism's lost children, the cavaliers live off of dreams and illusions—like Lövenborg, the cavalier who sits all day in the cavaliers' wing pretending to play music on a wooden board painted to look like a clavier, or Anders Fuchs who endeavors to kill a supernatural bear with a silver bullet, or Kevenhüller, the inventor, who is granted remarkable powers of genius from a beautiful forest nymph he meets one day in Karlstad. Their willingness to believe in the fantastic

[64] Wivel, *Snödrottningen,* 65.

leads them to believe what Sintram tells them about the majoress and her trade with the devil in cavaliers' souls. Their anger upon finding this out leads them to expose the majoress as an adulteress in front of her husband, which in turn leads to her being driven out of Ekeby, and their catastrophic year-long rule over her estate.

In Lagerlöf's representation of Gösta Berling and the cavaliers we can see evidence of the same kind of ambiguity that surrounds all of the central conflicts in the novel—just as we are never sure whether the ghosts and devils in the novel are real, we can never be quite sure whether the cavaliers deserve to be celebrated as heroes and paragons of creativity, or whether they deserve to be scorned as forces of destruction and chaos. As Henrik Wivel notes, for all of its traces of incisive and parodic critique, Lagerlöf's presentation of the cavaliers is also "lavish, full of fascination and love." [65] Much of this ambivalence is communicated to the reader via the voice of the narrator. When the cavaliers are disbanded at the end of the novel, the narrator seems to mourn their parting more than she celebrates the fact that goodness and righteousness have won out in the end. Her farewell to the cavaliers is as poignant as though she were saying goodbye to her dearest friends: "Ah, you good gentlemen cavaliers, for me as well the bitterness of parting hangs over this moment! This is the last night we will have watched through together. I will no longer hear the hearty laughter and merry songs. I will now be separated from you and all the happy people on the shores of Löven." [66] The fact that the novel recounts the events during the disastrous year of the cavaliers' rule (rather than the years of their retirement to a quieter life, or Gösta's reformed years living as a married

[65] Wivel, *Snödrottningen,* 65.
[66] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 398.

man) suggests that the narrator prefers the wild indulgence of the cavaliers' hedonistic lifestyle to the peace of the orderly and righteous life. She admits as much, in an apostrophic address in the middle of the novel: "May others listen to the talk of flowers and sunshine, but for myself I choose dark nights, full of visions and adventures, for me the hard fates, for me the sorrow-filled passions of wild hearts."[67] The narrator's admission here that she prefers stories about passion and suffering to those about flowers and sunshine parallels Macpherson's indulgence in sorrow and mourning in his poems. The same appreciation for melodrama and an indulgence in the expression of extremely heightened emotion can be seen in both authors' work.

We can see the narrator's preference for melodrama and extreme emotion not just in her portrayal of the cavaliers but also in her depiction of the plight suffered by the woman Gösta eventually marries, Countess Elisabet Dohna, whose unhappy marriage to a petty, foolish Count with a cruel and domineering mother mirrors the fate of many of d'Aulnoy's fairy tale heroines in the miseries they suffer in forced marriages. D'Aulnoy's strong critique of arranged marriage in her tales is echoed in several of the unhappy marriages depicted in *Gösta Berlings saga,* but perhaps especially in Elisabet's situation. When she develops feelings for Gösta and the Count's mother finds out, she makes Elisabet work like a servant in her own household, punishing her in all manner of sadistic ways—pouring scalding water over her arms, making her wait like a servant at her own table when her friends come to dinner, forcing her to do the washing in the freezing rain until blood runs from her fingernails. In this sequence of the novel, Elisabet's stepmother, Countess Märta becomes the wicked stepmother from the fairytale, and in her

[67] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 227.

masochistic submission Elisabet is Cinderella, or Snow White, or indeed, any number of the beleaguered heroines from d'Aulnoy's tales, like Laidronette in "The Green Serpent," who must gather water from a bottomless well with a millstone tied around her neck, or Florine in "The Blue Bird," who is locked in a tower and forced to wear rags by her wicked stepmother.

Lagerlöf borrowed often from the fairy tale, and her fascination with the wicked stepmother archetype and her suffering victims shows up in several of her novels. The central plot of her 1911 novel *Liljecronas Hem* (*Lilliecrona's Home,* which acts as a companion story to *Gösta Berlings saga,* telling the origin story of the cavalier Liljecrona and how he met his wife) revolves around the mistreatment of the parson's daughter, Maia Lisa, at the hands of her father's cruel new wife, Fru Raklitz, who is rumored to be a water-spirit from the Black Lake. The novel is full of scenes detailing the torments Fru Raklitz inflicts upon the good and innocent Maia Lisa, who in a chapter of the novel titled "Snow White," tells the story of her suffering to a friend of hers by comparing herself to the mistreated fairy tale heroine. Lagerlöf's 1899 novella, *En herrgårdssägen* (*The Tale of a Manor House*), which Lagerlöf herself referred to as a retelling of Beauty and the Beast, also contains various fairy tale motifs and themes, including another tormented young protagonist—Ingrid, who is so neglected and unloved by the foster family with whom she lives that she falls into a death-like coma, only to be brought to life again by the music of her true love's fiddle. Lagerlöf's 1904 novel, *Herr Arnes penningar* (*The Treasure*), features another tormented heroine—the character of Elsalill who falls in love with the murderer of her foster sister. Like d'Aulnoy's depiction of suffering female (and male) characters, Lagerlöf employs the same recipe of "frivolity,

dreaminess, blitheness and sadism" that Marina Warner characterizes as the "essential tone of fairy tale."[68] Thus, all three authors share a similar indulgence in melodrama and excess that I identify as queer in the sense that it pushes the boundaries of the norms for what we consider "good" and "bad" feelings, or "appropriate" and "inappropriate" emotions in response to certain experiences (i.e. getting pleasure from feelings of grief in Macpherson's poems, celebrating chaos and disorder in Lagerlöf's novel, or depicting the excessive pain and suffering experienced by a character in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales). This queer excess comes out in the melodramatic characteristics of all three authors' writing, and is evidence of how their writing can be understood as aesthetically queer in the way it pushes beyond limits and boundaries to give voice to a different way of conceptualizing the world.

The third and final aspect of the novel's queer ontology that perhaps shares the most in common with the queerness of d'Aulnoy's and Macpherson's supernatural universes is Lagerlöf's representation of the supernatural and its deep connections with the natural world. Both d'Aulnoy and Macpherson depict a permeable boundary between humans and nature in their representation of the supernatural—d'Aulnoy, through her human characters' transformations into animals and objects and in the ensuing hybridization of the human and the animal within these transformations. Macpherson also mingles the human and the natural through his depictions of the ghosts in his poems—by representing ghosts as comprised of natural elements, Macpherson's poetry suggests a fluid boundary between humans and nature, as well as between the material and the spiritual. Similarly, in Lagerlöf's novel, through the narrator and her access to the

[68] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde,* 288.

supernatural we learn that a spiritual presence exists in nature as well as the material world. Much like the living Celtic landscape in Macpherson's poetry, the natural world in *Gösta Berlings saga* is as alive as the novel's human characters, and is in possession of a life force and a spirituality of its own, sometimes manifesting in supernatural creatures and sometimes in the narrator's articulation of the inner life of animals, rivers, trees, and even the earth itself. The narrator's use of apostrophe therefore emphasizes what is already conveyed in other moments in the novel where we see that the natural world has a life force—and a power and a will—of its own.

In *Gösta Berlings saga*, everything is seen as a spiritual equal by the narrator; the landscape, the characters, even the objects are treated with the same empathetic view. The voice of the narrator and her use of apostrophe can be understood as anti-patriarchal because they model an empathetic way of participating in the world, rather than one based on hierarchy in which one group is understood to be superior to another. By speaking *to* animals and objects in the novel, the narrator establishes them as spiritual equals and therefore worthy of our attention. Jenny Bergenmar comments on how the voice of the narrator also creates empathy by helping us inhabit the perspective of the Other:

> When the narrator looks through the eyes of a character the reader is equally invited to do so. In *Gösta Berlings saga,* the narrator's empathy and understanding of her characters form a method of avoiding reification. The use of free indirect speech makes it possible to overhear the voice of 'the Other.' For with the rendering of other person's words we are invited actively to relate to the utterance, to listen in to the other voice which comes across by way of the narrator's voice.[69]

[69] Bergenmar, *Förvildade hjärtan,* 190.

By bringing other voices into the narrative, the novel participates in a kind of active listening that encourages the same empathy in its readers that is demonstrated by the narrator. What Bergenmar does not explicitly mention, but what I would like to emphasize is that the empathy that the novel encourages extends not just to its human characters but to the animals and objects in the novel as well; so while the world of the novel is highly personified, it does not privilege the human, but rather gives equal treatment to the non-human, whether that's the natural world or even the material objects in the lives of the humans.

The sentient forces within the natural world, its spirit, its very *alive*ness is evident from the very first chapter of the novel, when the narrator describes with great care the landscape in which the story takes place. She introduces the various aspects of the landscape with as much importance as she gives to the novel's human characters. The novel's first chapter, "The Landscape," begins like this: "Now I must describe the long lake, the fertile plain, and the blue hills, because this was the setting where Gösta Berling and the cavaliers of Ekeby lived out their eccentric existence." [70] Immediately we are made aware of the connection between the natural world and the supernatural world in the narrator's description of Löven lake: "It has fine, white sand on which to extend itself, promontories and small islands to reflect and observe, water sprite and sea witch have free rein there, and the lake quickly grows large and lovely." [71] The narrator's casual mention of the water sprite (*näck*) and sea witch (*sjörå*) who reside in the lake demonstrate that they are a naturally occurring, and completed expected, part of the

[70] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 22.
[71] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 22.

landscape. These casual references to the supernatural beings that dwell within nature occur throughout the novel—trolls, witches, and even ghosts inhabit the deepest and wildest parts of the forests, lakes, and mountains.

In her description of the lake, the narrator slips between referring to it as "it" and "he," personifying it regardless of which pronoun she uses. The same is true for the plain, and the hills, who speak to one another in friendly competition: "The plain laments that it has little room and a poor view. 'You are stupid,' the hills reply, 'you should just feel how the wind blows down here by the lake. At the very least a granite back and a coat of spruce is needed to endure it. And furthermore, you can be content looking at us.'"[72] Even the ending of the first chapter, when the narrator says: "May all go well for those who live up there by the long lake and the blue hills! And now I wish to relate a few of their memories",[73] it is not clear if she is referring to the memories of the hills themselves, or the people who inhabit them. The landscape, and the people who inhabit it, are not only equally important in the eyes of the narrator, they are so interconnected that it is often difficult to tell them apart; they share a deeply connected and symbiotic relationship. Like the ghosts in *The Works of Ossian*, who demonstrate the human connection to the natural world by riding on storm clouds and materializing out of wind, the natural world is vividly present in the lives of the human characters in Lagerlöf's novel.

The supernatural beings that dwell in nature are evidence of its vitality and spiritual presence. Like Macpherson's ghosts, Lagerlöf's witches, trolls, and water spirits

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[72] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 25.
[73] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 26.

occupy a liminal space between humans and nature, challenging the logic that suggests they must be one or the other. In Swedish folklore, as in Celtic folklore and mythology, these beings exist on the margins of human society and encounters with them often represent a transgression of social rules or norms. Although they can possess some human characteristics, they are often dangerous, and full of ill-will towards humans. In the chapter, "The Great Bear in Gurlita Bluff," in which the cavaliers set out to hunt their old enemy, the great bear that is said can only be felled with a silver bullet, we can see just how dangerous the natural world can be, made clear to us through the narrator's apostrophic address of warning to the reader in a tone that is characteristic of the cautionary folk tale:

> Nature is spiteful, treacherous as a sleeping snake, not to be believed. There is Löven lake in magnificent beauty, but don't trust him, he is waiting for prey: every year he must collect his tax of drownings. There is the forest, peaceful and enticing, but don't trust him! The forest is full of unholy animals, possessed by the souls of evil trolls and blood-thirsty scoundrels.
>
> Don't trust the brook with its smooth water! Wading in it after sundown brings sudden illness and death. Trust not the cuckoo who called so merrily in spring! Toward autumn he becomes a hawk with forbidding eyes and gruesome claws! Trust not the moss, not the heather, not the rock; nature is evil, possessed by invisible forces who hate humankind. There is no place where you can safely set your foot. It is strange that your weak race can avoid so much persecution.
>
> Terror is a witch. Is she still sitting in the dark of the Värmland forests, singing troll songs? Does she still darken the beauty of smiling places, does she still paralyze the joy of being alive? Her dominion has been great, that I know, I who have had steel in my crib and charcoal in the bathwater, that I know, I who have felt her iron hand around my heart.[74]

Although in this particular instance of apostrophe, Lagerlöf's narrator is not speaking *to* the natural world, but rather about it to the reader, the animated force in the natural world

[74] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 99.

is very present—clearly illustrated by its will to do harm, and also by the narrator's use of masculine personal pronouns to refer to the forest, the hawk, and Löven lake.[75]

We can also see in this passage yet another example of the narrator's shifting identity. At the end of the second paragraph, the voice that is speaking to us identifies itself as being something other than human by commenting on the weakness of *your* race (not *our* race), clearly establishing that this voice is something other than human. There is almost a mocking quality to the voice speaking there, or at least a note of disdain that humans can survive so much peril in spite of their fragility. Perhaps then, the voice of warning in the previous two paragraphs was also a non-human voice; after all, it is a voice that seems to know intimately the intentions of the evil beings that dwell in the forest—how else would it have access to this knowledge?

In the third paragraph, however, the voice switches back to a human speaker again, evidenced by the return of the "I" and the mention of the talismans humans use in folk tradition to keep evil spirits away (charcoal in the bathwater and steel in the crib). The return of the "I" alerts us that the voice speaking now is our narrator/storyteller who clearly identifies herself in the next paragraph when she relates: "But no one should think that I am now going to tell of something gruesome and terrible. This is only an old story about the great bear in Gurlita Bluff that I must relate, and it is completely up to anyone to believe it or not, just as it should be with all real hunting stories."[76] The return of the human voice of our storytelling narrator invokes an oral storytelling tradition once again by explicitly referencing her tale-telling. This framing of the story with the narrator's

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[75] Paul Norlen's translation here closely follows the Swedish which indicates a masculine gender by referring to the forest, the lake, and the hawk as *han* (he) and *honom* (him), instead of *det* (it) or *den* (it), which is how they would normally be described in a non-anthropomorphized sense.
[76] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 100.

interjections functions in a similar way to the frame narratives used by d'Aulnoy in her fairy tale collections, drawing in the reader in by soliciting a response from them. By making the reader the object of her apostrophic address and inviting the reader into the story in this relational way, these instances of apostrophic address enable another kind of collective creativity in which the reader can take an active part in the story.

The narrator's shifting and empathetic presence gives us access not only to the supernatural dwellers in the forest, but to its animal inhabitants as well, as a few lines later in this same chapter she takes up the point of view of the hunted bear. She does not speak in his voice, but she describes him with as much attention and empathy as though he were a human character in the novel. She describes how he lies sleeping in his winter den, safe from the driving snow outside, and "like the sleeping princess in the fairy tale" who is awakened by love, "so he wants to be wakened by spring": [77]

> Is he a poet then, a delicate dreamer, this hirsute forest king, this slant-eyed robber? Does he want to sleep away the bleak nights and colorless days of the cold winter, to be wakened by purling brooks and birdsong? Does he want to lie there, dreaming of ripening lingonberry slopes and of anthills filled with brown, tasty beings, and of the white lambs who pasture on the green slopes? Does he, the fortunate one, want to avoid the winter of life? [78]

Although she does not speak in the bear's voice, she is able to occupy his point of view, to look at the world through his eyes—imagining ants, for example, as "brown, tasty beings"—a perspective that only a bear would have. In doing this, the narrator extends the same personhood to this bear as any of her human characters. This empathetic treatment of the bear continues when the narrator relates how he has been the victim of human persecution. Referring to him as the "forest king," his wife as "his high consort,"

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[77] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 100.
[78] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 100.

and their den as “the old royal fortress,” she tells how the cavaliers took his eye one night when he visited a farm to steal a cow, and how, on another occasion, they broke into his winter den, shooting him in the thigh, killing his wife and carrying off “the royal children” to be raised as the servants of men. The narrator’s references to the bears’ royal lineage eliminates their animal status—her descriptions could just as well be descriptions of a human royal family, and thus bestows the same value upon them.

Throughout her narration of this sequence, the narrator shifts between the perspective of the bear, and the cavaliers who come to hunt him again. In this way, she gives equal treatment to all involved in the scene, establishing equality between the animal and human characters. Once again in this scene, we see an affinity between the narrator and Gösta Berling, as in the midst of the hunt, Gösta finds himself overcome with empathy for the hunted animal. Gösta has the bear in his sights and his finger on the trigger, but he suddenly finds he cannot shoot. When the bear comes charging towards him, “Gösta sees him as he is: a poor, hunted animal, whose life he will not take from him, the last thing he has left, since humans have taken everything else away from him. ‘May he kill me,’ thinks Gösta, ‘but I won’t shoot.’”[79] Gösta’s empathetic shift in perspective towards the bear mirrors the narrator’s own stance, who treats the bear as an individuated subject deserving of personhood and in possession of a rich inner life. Gösta and the narrator’s attitude towards the bear in this chapter is representative of the larger attitude in the novel towards the natural world, which is characterized by a recognition that all of nature is imbued with spiritual life, and therefore deserving of the same respect we give human life. In this way, the novel refuses the nature/culture binary, upsetting the

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[79] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 102.

hierarchy that dictates that culture and the world of the human is superior to the natural world. When the bear escapes, much to the chagrin of the other cavaliers, Gösta's response is to laugh: "How could they expect that a person as fortunate as he should do harm to one of God's created beings?" [80] Gösta's recognition that the bear's life is equally deserving of respect as any of "God's created beings" gestures towards the equality granted to all living things in the world of the novel, and demonstrates the same equality we saw established between humans and nature in Macpherson's poems and d'Aulnoy's fairy tales.

This same respect for nature, conveyed through the supernatural creatures who inhabit it and their dealings with human characters, can be seen throughout Lagerlöf's oeuvre—including in her most internationally well-known book, *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* (The Wonderful Adventures of Nils), 1906-07. Borrowing heavily from folklore, fairy tale, and fable, *Nils* tells the story of a little boy who is cruel to animals on the farm where he lives in southern Sweden. He is reprimanded by a *tomte* (a supernatural figure from Swedish folklore that lives on farms), who transforms Nils into a tomte himself so that he might learn to be kind to animals. Shrunken in size, and now equipped with the ability to talk to animals, Nils joins a flock of wild geese as they fly around Sweden. The book was originally commissioned as a geographical reader for Swedish elementary school children, but in addition to teaching them about the geography, landscape, and regional differences of Sweden, the book also demonstrates the importance of treating animals, and the whole of the natural world with respect. Nils must convince the wild geese that he is a worthy companion, so in a sense he must learn

[80] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 102.

to think and act like a goose. By the end of the book he has learned not only to respect animals, but also, how to think like them. Like d'Aulnoy's magical transformations that demonstrate the equality between humans and animals, Nils new-found capacity to treat animals and the natural world with respect is made possible thanks to Nils' magical transformation into a tomte himself. Thus, transformation provides access to new forms of knowledge that the character can only access by having an embodied and deeply material encounter with the natural world.

Although there are no explicit transformations in *Gösta Berlings saga*, through the empathetic voice of the narrator Lagerlöf demonstrates that nature deserves to be respected because it has a spiritual presence just like human beings. She conveys this both through the supernatural creatures that dwell within the natural world, but also through her characterization of how nature is affected by the way humans treat it. We can see an example of this in the chapter titled, "Drought," in which the natural world becomes its most animated during a period of extreme duress. After a year of neglect under the cavaliers' rule, the land itself rises up in protest, animated with malevolent force. Throughout this chapter, the narrator speaks to the reader in the first-person as she explains the symbiosis that exists between people and the natural world, explaining that those things we think of as dead are in fact very much alive:

> For it often seems to me as if dead things feel and suffer with the living. The barrier between them and us is not as great as people think. What part of the earth's matter is there that has not been part of the cycle of life? Hasn't the drifting dust of the road been caressed as soft hair, loved as good, benevolent hands? Hasn't the water in the waterwheel flowed in bygone days as blood through beating hearts?
>
> The spirit of life still lives in dead things. What does he sense, where he slumbers in dreamless sleep? The voice of God he hears. Does he also take note of the human?

> Oh, latter-day children, haven't you seen it? When discord and hatred fill the earth, then dead things too must suffer greatly. Then the wave becomes wild and rapacious as a robber, then the field becomes barren as a miser. But woe to anyone for whose sake the forest sighs and the hills weep! [81]

In the narrator's acknowledgment that "the spirit of life still lives in dead things" and that "dead things" can suffer just as much as the living, she bestows upon them the same kind of personhood that she extended to the bear in the previous chapter, demonstrating that everything on earth—even the water in the water wheel and the drifting dust from the road—are deserving of our respect as living beings. In the same way that d'Aulnoy's animal transformation tales demonstrated the equal value between a bird and a king, or a bee and a princess, Lagerlöf's novel describes a universe in which all life forms should be equally valued. Furthermore, the shape-shifting, transformational aspects of the material world that we saw in both d'Aulnoy's fairy tales and in Macpherson's poems can also be seen here, in the narrator's description of blood becoming water, of human hands and hair becoming dust. There is a recognition of the cyclical nature of life, and an understanding that the barriers we demarcate between different oppositional categories (between life and death, humans and nature, man and woman) are much more easily transgressed than we think. Thus, Lagerlöf's novel articulates the same kind of liminal universe of expansion and border-crossing that we saw in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, Macpherson's poems, and also, in the Scottish ballads, especially in "The Twa Sisters."

The narrator's description of the transformation of hair into dust on the road and blood from beating hearts to water is reminiscent of the transformative motif at the heart of this dissertation, of a magical harp being fashioned out of a dead girl's hair and bones.

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[81] Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gösta Berling,* 313.

The Swedish version of this ballad, "De Två Systrarna," which first appeared in print in a collection by A. Afzelius in 1810, is almost identical to the Scottish version, and is equally popular. The most comprehensive Swedish ballad collection, *Sveriges Medeltida Ballader* lists over 26 different variants of the ballad recorded from singers from all over Sweden. Although minor variations exist among the different versions, the core story is the same. In one version recorded in Uppland in 1810, instead of a musician discovering the drowned girl's body and turning it into a harp, the girl's body is discovered by a näck, a supernatural creature in Swedish folklore who dwells in lakes and rivers, mentioned often by Lagerlöf throughout *Gösta Berlings saga* as one of the denizens of the natural world. In Swedish folk tradition, the näck is known for its ethereal beauty and for its ability to lure men and women to their death by drowning after hearing the music from its enchanted harp. The näck appears in multiple ballads in the Scandinavian tradition[82] and shares similarities with Irish and Scottish folktales and ballads about fairies and otherworldly beings who spirit humans away to magical other worlds (like "King Orfeo", "Tam Lin," and "Thomas the Rhymer"). The näck's otherworldly musical abilities make him a logical choice as the being to render the dead sister's body into a harp that will murder the guilty sister with its song, and not only establishes a parallel with other ballads featuring this kind of musical enchantment, but also with Ossian as a figure with access to a supernatural otherworld through his magical harp.

Like it's Scottish counterpart, the Swedish ballad contains evidence of the belief that the soul and the body are intimately connected; the reason that the harp can tell its story is because the sister's soul still exists in her material remains. This core belief in the

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[82] To name just a few listed in *Sveriges Medeltida Ballader*: "Harpans Kraft" (TSB A 50), "Agneta och havsmannen" (TSB A 47), and "Näcken bortför jungfrun" (TSB A 48)

transformative capacity of the human body and in the integral connection between body and spirit exists throughout Lagerlöf's novel, just as it does in the work of other folkloric texts we have explored thus far in this dissertation. What Lagerlöf's novel demonstrates is how the supernatural can help us envision a world where this kind of thinking is not just a metaphor, but instead gives us access to a world where there is no division between the body and the spirit, and where a vibrant spiritual presence exists in the natural world. In other words, a queer supernatural universe where all lives are given equal value, no matter where they fall on the hierarchical scale of human measurement.

In *Gösta Berlings Saga*, then, we see how binary thinking fails to accurately describe the world. Instead, we are given access to a world in which the boundaries between humans and nature, between the body and the soul, and between the oral and the literary, are constantly shifting. Just as Gösta Berling himself is referred to as a poet who has never written any poems, Lagerlöf's novel reminds us that poetry has its origins in the belief of the transformative power of language. In its inclusion of both lyric and narrative elements, as well as its references to both oral and literary culture, *Gösta Berlings saga* blurs the boundary between the oral and the written. Lagerlöf's simultaneous use of apostrophe and folklore manages to refer both to the novel's status as a literary text full of poetic and lyric elements, while also acknowledging its inheritance from an older set of beliefs that saw an actual magic power in the act of speaking. What this reveals about the novel is that through its form, in the use of folkloric motifs, as well as its frequent uses of apostrophe, it gives value to an oral literary culture, establishing

that empathy and collectivity are vital parts of the creative process, as well as vital components in our understanding of the world.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: QUEERNESS IN THE WILD

Just this year (2020), the School of Critical Studies at the University of Glasgow in Scotland launched a new Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic. In a virtual event commemorating the center's opening this September, fantasy author Ellen Kushner gave a lecture about her engagement with Scottish folklore in her 1990 novel retelling of the Scottish ballad, *Thomas the Rhymer*. Described by Kushner as "one of the greats in the pantheon of myths," Thomas travels to Elfland, "to the land of myth with nothing but his harp," and when he returns to the mortal realm, he brings back the truth, although it seems like nothing more than a tale to those who hear it.[1] For Kushner, this is the essence of great fantasy writing—its ability to convey the truth, even while that truth may be dressed in the most fantastical garb. Fantasy and fantastic literature concretize what in the real world remains abstract, vague, impossible to visualize. Citing Shakespeare's famous lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Kushner attested that fantasy "gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."

In a roundtable discussion with author Terri Windling, Professor Brian Attebery and Dr. Robert Maslen after Kushner's talk, moderator Dr. Laura Martin posed this question to the discussants: In times of great crises like those we are living through, what use does fantastic literature have? How can fantasy and fantastic fiction help us to engage with our current crises? In short, what is fantasy good for? Dr. Maslen's answer echoed some of what Kushner had articulated in her keynote address: "Fantasy is about writing

[1] Kushner, "Launching the Centre," September 16, 2020.

the personal truth that only the teller knows. In times of crisis, it is often the strident and authoritarian voices that are the loudest. The quiet, marginalized voices can speak in disguised ways in fantasy literature."[2] As an example, he named that original fabulist, Aesop, whose fables are told from the point of a view of a slave. Terri Windling spoke about the power in those smaller, more domestic stories of personal transformation found in folk and fairy tales, where symbol can give shape to evil otherwise too difficult to name. "Like poetry, fantasy gives us language to talk about things that are too difficult to put into words. We can get to the truth slant wise. Fantasy allows us to talk about these very big things. […] It's a way of creating the worlds we want to live in."[3] Brian Attebery mentioned how dominant cultural narratives can be re-worked from the inside out through fantasy literature. Naming contemporary fantasy writers like N. K. Jemisin, Andrea Hairston, and Zen Cho, Attebery emphasized the subversive power of fantasy literature in the way it can "unwrite the master plot" by re-mixing and combining familiar tropes and motifs from the genre.[4]

In their responses, all three panelists spoke to the creative power in fantasy and fantastic literature to re-shape the world. In its richly imaginative capacity, fantasy has the tools to build new worlds and create new ways of thinking, to write over so many of the toxic myths that have persisted in our cultural storytelling. This transformative power of fantasy literature is the same utopian capacity identified by fairy tale scholars like Seifert, Zipes, Warner, and Bacchilega. As these scholars point out, as much as fairy tales (and other forms of fantastic literature) look towards the future, they are simultaneously

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[2] Maslen, "Launching the Centre," September 16, 2020.
[3] Windling, "Launching the Centre," September 16, 2020.
[4] Attebery, "Launching the Centre," September 16, 2020.

oriented toward the past—both in their nostalgic attempts to recover former communities and modes of oral literary production that may have been lost, but also, in their connection to the traditions that generated those tales, and to the landscapes where they were told. As Sara Maitland writes in *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of our Forest and Fairy Tales,* "Landscape informs the collective imagination as much as or more than it forms the individual psyche and its imagination, but this dimension is not something to which we always pay enough attention."[5] To this end, the panelists also spoke about fantasy's deep roots in nature and the natural world, and the potential it has to re-connect us to wild and natural spaces.

We need these kinds of stories now more than ever. The various ecological and environment crises we are currently facing have become too urgent to ignore. But fantasy literature offers hope. Terri Windling described the way fantasy literature can reconnect us with the natural world: "We need to re-story the landscape as the first step into taking care of it and defending it. As fellow beings on this earth, we need to protect our non-human neighbors."[6] Fantasy literature can help us re-wild our stories, as Sylvia Linsteadt urges in her essay, "Turning our Fairy Tales Wild Again":

> Metaphor, perhaps, is the tame, the civilized, version of shamanic shapeshifting, word-magic, the recognition of stories as toothed messengers from the wilds. What if we turned the old nursery rhymes and fairytales we all know into feral creatures once again, set them loose in new lands to root through the acorn fall of oak trees? What else is there to do, if we want to keep any of the wildness of the world, and of ourselves?[7]

In the last few years, wildness has also become a concept of interest in queer scholarship, particularly for indigenous communities and communities of color, evidenced by the

[5] Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest,* 7.
[6] Windling, "Launching the Centre," September 16, 2020.
[7] Lindsteadt, "Turning Our Fairy Tales Feral Again."

collection of essays in the July 2018 issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly,* all focused on the theme of 'Wildness,' exploring topics like "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner," "Messy Mismeasures: Exploring the Wilderness of Queer Migrant Lives," and "Radical Black Feminism in a Dystopian Age."

In their introduction to the issue, queer scholars Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong'o articulate the powerful resonances between queerness and wildness:

> Wildness has certainly functioned as a foil to civilization, as the dumping ground for all that white settler colonialism has wanted to declare expired, unmanageable, undomesticated, and politically unruly. For us, that makes wildness all the more appealing. Like another problematic term—*queer*—*wildness* names, while rendering partially opaque, what hegemonic systems would interdict or push to the margins.[8]

Associations between queerness and otherness, and thus, queerness and animality, or monstrosity, have been made by queer scholars before.[9] In their precision of *wildness,* however, Halberstam and Nyong'o name the forces in the natural world—and also in queerness—that give these marginal categories their particular power: "Wildness is where the environment speaks back, where communication bows to intensity, where worlds collide, cultures clash, and things fall apart." [10] Wildness, like queerness, can bring confusion, chaos, disruption, and unpredictability, but also—potentially, pleasure and play. They go on to say that: "The rewilding of theory proceeds from an understanding that first encounters with wildness are intimate and bewilder all sovereign expectations of autonomous selfhood. To be wild in this sense is to be beside oneself, to

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[8] Halberstam and Nyong'o, "Theory in the Wild," 453.

[9] See for example Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003); *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Queer Inhumanisms) Volume 21, Numbers 2-3, June 2015; *Animalities: Literary and Cultural Studies Beyond the Human,* ed. Michael Lundblad (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

[10] Halberstam and Nyong'o, "Theory in the Wild," 454.

be internally incoherent, to be driven by forces seen and unseen, to hear in voices, and to speak in tongues."[11]

Their description of encounters with wildness demanding not only intimacy but a total dissolution of the self, a kind of possession that entails access to other voices, and the ability to *speak* in other voices too, could serve as a description of encounters with the natural world depicted in the works of the three authors examined in this dissertation. Halberstam and Nyong'o's remarks on the queer potential in conceptualizing wildness resonates with the premise at the heart of this project, which is that stories about wild beings and spaces—in other words, stories about supernatural encounters with the natural world—offer powerful ways to think through otherness and marginality.

In the writing of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, James Macpherson, and Selma Lagerlöf, the supernatural draws our attention to the material world, including our bodies, and the sensory experiences we have as a result of our embodiment. These sensory experiences that the supernatural emphasizes also expand our definition of the erotic by reorienting where desire and pleasure can be located, namely, beyond the framework of heterosexist patriarchy. By depicting situations of desire involving humans of various gender orientations, but also with animals, plants, and objects in the natural world, the supernatural expands the capacity for erotic attachment by articulating a more fluid and multiple appreciation of beauty and a recognition of life outside the parameters of the strictly human.

In d'Aulnoy's fairy tales we saw how the seventeenth-century literary salon provided a space for d'Aulnoy's astute yet coded critiques of seventeenth-century gender

[11] Halberstam and Nyong'o, "Theory in the Wild," 454.

roles. Inspired by early literary fairy tales like Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Straparola's *Le Piacevoli Notti,* d'Aulnoy re-inscribed the orality of the salon into the literary context of the fairy tale by using a narrative frame to depict a dynamic interchange between the tale teller and her listeners. D'Aulnoy's use of frame narratives to organize her stories, and her textual allusions to the collaborative space of the salon, illustrate how her literary fairy tales emerged out of a practice of collective creativity, in which authorship is the result of collaborative rather than individual efforts. D'Aulnoy's literary fairy tales are hybrid creations that combine both oral and literary, as well as ancient and modern sources. The formal hybridity in d'Aulnoy's writing, and in the work of all three authors, is queer in the way it disrupts the hierarchy regarding the oral and the written. In mixing oral and literary elements, d'Aulnoy's tales give equal value to the oral and literary creative practices.

D'Aulnoy's tales articulate a queer imaginary through their creation of marvelous fairy tale worlds governed by the magic of fairies and enchanters. Identity and desire are queered in her tales through the magical transformations of her characters, whose shifting bodies demonstrate that identity is not fixed or essential but shifting, fluid, and multiple. In their depiction of the love and desire experienced between human and non-human characters, her tales expand our definition of the erotic beyond a heteronormative framework by re-orienting where desire and pleasure can be located. By emphasizing the sensory aspects of the material world, her tales also establish the body as a source of both knowledge and pleasure. Thus, the magic of the fairy tale enabled her to articulate non-normative representations of identity and desire.

In Macpherson's poems, I examined the queer ontology of the liminal world of the Scottish Highlands, in which the boundaries between the natural and the human world, as well as the material and spiritual world, are constantly in flux. I showed how the liminal quality of the world Macpherson creates is deeply connected to the oral history Macpherson was working from, in that the Celtic bard at the center of Macpherson's cycle of *Ossian* poems was imagined to be an intermediary with the spiritual world. The character Ossian acts as an intermediary with the ghosts of those who have died within the poems just as Macpherson, as author, attempted to transmit vestiges of a lost oral tradition to a new literate population of readers. The result was a collection of poems that expressed their liminality formally in their status as partly oral, partly literary texts, but also in the content of the poems, which articulate a world where boundaries are constantly shifting and fluid, and in which magic is both an integral part of the natural world and central to the experience of what it is to be human.

Like d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, Macpherson's poems are also hybrid texts that combine oral and literary sources to articulate both individual and collective notions of authorship. By placing Ossian as the bardic voice at the center of his poems, Macpherson creates a situation of collective creativity within the poems as the voices of the dead speak through Ossian. Ossian's role as an intermediary with the supernatural realm of the dead means he is able to transgress the boundary between the living and the dead, as well as the material and spiritual world. Like the magical transformations in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, the ghosts in *The Works of Ossian* illustrate a permeable boundary between the human and the natural world.

Like both Macpherson and d'Aulnoy, Selma Lagerlöf fused oral folkloric sources with literary ones to create a unique kind of orality within the context of the novel. Like Macpherson's figure of the liminal bard Ossian, the narrator at the center of her novel *Gösta Berlings saga,* gives voice to an oral tradition Lagerlöf experienced in her childhood. Just as Ossian acts as an intermediary with the liminal landscape of the Highlands and the ghosts that populate it, so too does Lagerlöf's queer narrator have special access to the natural world and the supernatural creatures it contains. The narrator's fluid and shifting identity, and her ability to speak in many voices also echoes the collective speaking powers possessed by Ossian, who both speaks with his dead friends and relatives, and often in their voices too. The same liminality and boundary-crossing we saw in d'Aulnoy's and Macpherson's poetic universes can also be seen in the queer poetic imaginary articulated in Lagerlöf's folklore-infused novels, which dissolve the boundaries between men and women, humans and nature, the material and the spiritual, and the living and the dead.

Finally, I argued that all three authors used sources with oral folkloric roots and supernatural elements to convey something about their experiences as cultural outsiders. In d'Aulnoy's case, as a woman in patriarchal France when women's destinies depended on fathers and husbands, the marvelous genre of the fairy tale enabled her to tell stories that established women as powerful, intelligent, equals of men who are not only free to choose their own romantic partners, but where female pleasure is foregrounded and celebrated. For Macpherson as a Gaelic Scot, writing for an English-speaking audience in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of Highland culture by the English, his poems provided a way for him to articulate the richness of a dynamic oral and collective poetic

tradition that he had witnessed in his childhood. His depictions of Ossian's melancholy interactions with the ghosts of his dead ancestors gave Macpherson a way to grieve the destruction of his own cultural traditions and elegize the power and beauty in what had been lost.

For Selma Lagerlöf, growing up in the male-dominated culture of late nineteenth-century Sweden and knowing from a very young age that she wanted to become a successful author, in a very material way the money she earned from her writing made it possible for her to live the kind of life she wanted, on her own terms, free from the dominion of a husband. Through her novels, Lagerlöf was able to establish that the rich oral folkloric traditions from her native province were worth valuing, and that her neo-Romantic, fantastical style of writing was as equally deserving of respect as the sober realistic writing of her Scandinavian contemporaries. Furthermore, Lagerlöf's writing gave her a way to create complex, multi-faceted, and nuanced characters who defy gender stereotypes. Through her novels, Lagerlöf was also able to give voice to her own queer ideas and desires in coded ways that she could not otherwise represent in the homophobic, misogynist culture of nineteenth-century Sweden.

In sum, I endeavored to show how genres with both oral roots and supernatural elements provide especially powerful tools for those who have been culturally marginalized and silenced to gain a voice and articulate their non-normative, or non-hegemonic ways of looking at the world, both when it comes to bodily autonomy, relationships with other humans, and with the natural world.

While this dissertation has focused on how these three particular authors engage with supernatural folkloric materials to create queer ways of envisioning the world, my aim in this project has been to establish a framework for others to identify and locate similar materials—texts with oral, folkloric, and supernatural elements—in order to read them with an eye to their potential to re-imagine hegemonic and normative structures. The potential objects of study for this kind of work are limitless. However, in closing I would like to name one more writer, whose work offers a final example of the kinds of queer imaginaries I describe in this dissertation, and that I hope will serve to illuminate other works that can be examined in a similar way.

English writer Angela Carter (1940-1992) could be described as the feminist fairy godmother of the fairy tale genre. Her 1979 collection of feminist fairy tale retellings, *The Bloody Chamber,* was published at a time when the popular view among feminist scholars was that fairy tales should be abandoned, as structures so deeply bound up with misogyny and the oppression of women that it was impossible to disentangle them from their patriarchal origins. However, other feminist scholars—Angela Carter among them—argued that in fact it was more radical to use the old oppressive structures and re-work them from the inside out. As Carter wrote: "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the bottle explode."[12] And explode them she did.

In her collection of ten re-told fairy tales, Carter re-imagines the landscape of the fairy tale in a sensual, ornamental style that shares much in common with the excess and extravagance in the writing of all three authors examined in this dissertation. Her

[12] Carter, "Notes from the Front Line," 69.

narrative voice demonstrates the same kind of multivocality we saw in the narrators of all three authors. At times, she seems to speak in the voices of traditional tale-tellers, moving seamlessly from first-to-second person, addressing her reader directly in the style of the cautionary tale to warn about the dangers in the natural world (both "The Erl King" and "The Company of Wolves" could function comfortably as chapters in *Gösta Berlings saga*). Other times, she writes in a lavish, Baroque style clearly inspired by d'Aulnoy and other writers from the first vogue of French literary tales, especially in her stories "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Tiger's Bride." Like d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, Carter's stories depict worlds where the borders between the human and the animal are elastic and constantly shifting. Her stories both interrogate and critique patriarchal structures, and envision queer couplings between the human and the natural world.

Carter does not shy away from sexuality in her writing—instead, she foregrounds it, making explicit the erotic currents that lie under the surface of fairy tales about love and courtship. In "The Erl King," an "I" speaking voice is summoned into the depths of the woods to sleep with the eldritch Erl-King, who is represented as the living embodiment of the forest where he lives, described by the narrator as coming "alive from the desire of the woods."[13] He lures the speaker to him with the whistle he fashions out of an elder twig, like the *näck* in Swedish ballads who ensnares his victims with the music from his fiddle, or the enchanted pipes played by the fairies in Irish folktales. His erotic appeal is rendered exclusively in the sensual terms of the dense woodland kingdom over which he rules: "His skin is the tint and texture of sour cream, he has stiff, russet nipples ripe as berries. Like a tree that bears bloom and fruit on the same bough together, how

[13] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber,* 86.

pleasing, how lovely."[14] In its associations with the natural world, his erotic appeal is deeply androgynous, as represented in this moment of comparison between his skin and a flowering tree. The image of a male lover being likened to a tree bearing not only blossom but fruit shares resonances with the same queer feminine imagery of the flowering orange tree prince in d'Aulnoy's tale. Like d'Aulnoy, Carter's ability to evoke the erotic and sensual components of the natural world queers the gendered dynamics of sex, while also challenging the divide that separates humans from nature. By depicting the vibrant, living presence of nature through her supernatural characters (much like Lagerlöf does in *Gösta Berlings saga*), Carter's post-modern fairy tales invite a deeper engagement in our relationships with the natural world—even if those encounters are often unpredictable, chaotic, and charged with danger.

In "The Erl King" we can also see the same transformative logic of the queer ontologies depicted in d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, Macpherson's poems, and Lagerlöf's novels, in which the entire universe—both material and spiritual—is unsettled, shifting, constantly on the verge of transforming into something else. All the boundaries and distinctions melt away, metaphor becomes literal. In her description of another erotic interlude with the Erl-King, the narrator tells us: "His skin covers me entirely; we are like two halves of a seed, enclosed in the same integument. I should like to grow enormously small, so that you could swallow me, like those queens in fairy tales who conceive when they swallow a grain of corn or a sesame seed. Then I could lodge inside your body and you would bear me." [15] Here, the Erl-King's already androgynous gender is further queered by his lover's erotic desire to be swallowed by him and born from his body like a

[14] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber,* 88.
[15] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber,* 89.

child. This association of the Erl-King with the life-giving powers of the womb echo his powers as the living embodiment of the natural world, in which birth and death materially haunt his forest bower. In the figure of the Erl-King, the trope of Mother Earth is thus re-imagined as a mushroom-picking, pleasure-giving, feral goblin king.

"The Erl-King" also contains allusions to the ballad that frames this dissertation. Several times, the narrator mentions a broken fiddle on the wall of the Erl-King's forest home: "If I strung that old fiddle with your hair, we could waltz together to the music as the exhausted daylight founders among the trees."[16] Unlike the ill-fated boys and girls of so many tales and ballads who are lured unsuspectingly to their doom at the hands of their supernatural lovers, Carter's protagonist is much cleverer. Before she too can be trapped, she realizes that the birds the Erl-King keeps in cages around his house are actually the girls he has seduced and transformed, "each with the crimson imprint of his love-bite on their throats."[17] She comes up with a plan to free herself from her captor. When his dreaming head lies on her knee, she will "take two handfuls of his rustling hair," and strangle him. She will free the birds, who will change back into young girls, and then:

> she will string the old fiddle with five single strings of ash-brown hair.
>
> Then it will play discordant music without a hand touching it. The bow will dance over the new strings of its own accord and they will cry out: 'Mother, mother, you have murdered me!'

The final line of the story evokes both "The Twa Sisters" ballad in its representation of an instrument strung with the hair of its victim who plays itself in order to accuse the murderer, but also, "The Juniper Tree" (KHM 47), the grisly tale in the Grimm's

[16] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber,* 89.
[17] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber,* 91.

collection about the little boy beheaded by his stepmother and turned into a soup that she feeds to his unwitting father. The dead boy's sister buries his bones under the Juniper Tree in the garden, causing the boy to return in the form of a bird that sings this eerie refrain: "My mother, she killed me./ My father, he ate me./ My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see/ my bones were all gathered together,/ bound nicely in silk, as neat can be,/ and laid beneath the juniper tree./ *Tweet, tweet!* What a lovely bird I am!'"[18] At the end of the tale, the bird drops a millstone on the head of the stepmother, killing her, and the boy re-emerges in his human form to re-join his family. Like "The Twa Sisters" ballad, "The Juniper Tree" contains similar themes of grisly familial murder, transformation, and revenge. The singing bird in the Grimm's story, like the singing bones of the drowned girl from the ballad, convey the truth about the murder through song, which leads to retribution for the murderer.

In Carter's story, significantly, the age-old tale of supernatural seduction and entrapment is told from the point of view of the victim. This is what gives power to her feminist retellings—we hear the story from the voice of the character that in the old versions of the tale was as mute as Hans Christian Andersen's little mermaid after the sea-witch cuts out her tongue. In Carter's stories, the victims speak back. Like true Thomas after he returns from Elfland, Carter's protagonists speak truth in the way that only characters in ballads and fairy tales can—in the language of symbol and myth—like the voice of the drowned sister issuing from the bone harp when she sings the truth about her death. This is the power in re-telling old tales.

[18] Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,* 161-162.

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