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Monkey Tails: D'Aulnoy and Unger Explore Descartes,
Rousseau, and the Animal–Human Divide

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Monkey Tails

D'Aulnoy and Unger Explore Descartes, Rousseau, and the Animal–Human Divide

“What a difference between what I am and what I was meant to be!”

—“Babiolo”

Two authors, born exactly a century apart, from different linguistic and cultural contexts, share a fairy tale of a princess metamorphized into a monkey. Why do they metamorphose their heroines into simians, and how do the notions of two philosophers, René Descartes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, inform their disenchantments? A side-by-side examination of two tales, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's “Babiolo” and Friederike Helene Unger's “Prinzessin Gracula,” reveals how these authors use the figure of the monkey to explore the boundaries of their heroines' humanness. Despite the conceit that their tales were mere *bagatelles* or *Kleinigkeiten*, the stories prove to be carefully crafted narratives that take their metamorphized protagonists through trials as our closest relatives to achieve the fullness of their humanity. Writing in a world where men determined the literary and intellectual realms that women could occupy and specifically excluded them from philosophy, d'Aulnoy and Unger exploit men's notions by showing how applying the philosophers' standards could elevate “incomplete” women to their intellectual and rational equals.

Philosophies Underlying These Tales

Although women were historically disqualified from *writing* philosophy, they were not prevented from *reading* it. In France, intellectually engaged women of the late seventeenth century, excluded from the male academies and

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universities, metamorphosed themselves into educated members of salon society and participated in the social and philosophical debates of their times. With the shift in philosophical writing from Latin to French vernacular in the middle of the seventeenth century, a flood of works became accessible to those readers without academic training; the writings of René Descartes (1596–1650) were the most read and discussed in the salons of the Ancien Régime¹ and had an important influence on feminist thought in the early Enlightenment. A century later in Germany, women in the waning years of the eighteenth participated in the philosophical debates of their times. As Heide von Felden has established, these women, also excluded from systematic education, engaged in a kind of autodidactic learning. Reading and discussing Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) became an essential part of their education.² Of special interest for this essay are the discussions about the animal–human divide.

The debate about the animal–human boundary reaches back into antiquity as philosophers struggled to establish criteria separating man from beasts.³ One proposition, begun with Aristotle, suggested that animals have some anthropomorphic characteristics, but only humans have reason and the capacity for speech. Opposing views, like those of Pliny the Elder, contended that animals might, in fact, have their own languages; even if humans do not understand them, nonhuman animals speak and are therefore rational. Building on previous debates, Descartes defined the boundary in his *Discours de la méthode* (*Discourse on Method*, 1637), where he proposed the idea of the *bête-machine* (animal machine): animals are mere automatons that react reflexively and are separate from humans because they possess neither intelligence nor language intelligible to humans and thus are incapable of *reason* (the conscious ability to make sense of things and to draw logical conclusions). Additionally, anthropocentric Cartesian philosophy posited that animals do not possess immortal souls and are therefore incapable of feeling pain or emotions. Desmond Hosford maintains that Descartes’s ideas “grounded the view that in seventeenth-century France, humans regarded nonhuman animals as soulless creatures created by God for their use, entertainment, and consumption,” but opposing beliefs in a pre-Cartesian model “generated discourses exposing anxieties over species boundaries between human and nonhuman animals” (515).⁴ Over the next century, philosophy continued to refine and posit new propositions regarding human’s place in the universe and human-kind’s nature.

One hundred and eighteen years after Descartes, Rousseau, one of the most influential philosophers, pedagogues, and social critics of the eighteenth century, published his ideas about species boundaries in his *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (*Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, 1755). Rousseau’s philosophy outlined

humankind's intellectual and moral progress toward civilization. Rousseau wondered how we understand ourselves in relation to less developed members of our own kind and what distinguishes humans from other species. His work showed developments in the philosophical discussion surrounding the "Chain of Being," the *scala naturae* that situated various creatures in the divine plan of creation within the hierarchical line of progression from the ants to the angels. The "Ape Debates"⁵ arose about the location of humanoids on the ladder.⁶ As Richard Noble explains, the debate about whether apes might be human "really turned on the question of what could count as legitimate criteria for establishing their humanity, or lack of it. It was ... more a debate about the boundaries of the human than the similarities between apes and men" (25).

It is all but certain that Rousseau himself never actually saw any primates—it was not until the 1770s that enough specimens had arrived in Europe for closer inspection. He based his ideas about the "legitimate criteria" for establishing the humanity of simians on their taxonomy. He reasoned that *tailed* simians were most certainly animals, whereas *tailless* primates, the great apes (what he called *orang outangs*), were either (a) clearly animals, (b) chimeric crosses between humans and animals, "monsters," or (c) "incomplete" humans, *hommes sauvages*. Rousseau argued for the third option, suggesting the tailless great apes were, in fact, incomplete humans who had "not had an opportunity to develop any of [their] potential faculties, had not acquired any degree of perfection and [were] still found in the primitive state of nature."⁷ Rousseau maintained that the criteria for being human was not language (as for Descartes), but rather what he considered a constituent feature of humans and not something acquired in the process of our species' evolution, namely *perfectibility*—the capacity to learn, to exercise self-rule, and to experience moral progress. Rousseau foresaw that the perfected individual would be self-conscious, rational, and moral. In the century between Descartes and Rousseau, ideas about human identity and what constituted humanness continued to be debated and are still today a topic of philosophical study.⁸

As they created their protagonists straddling the line between the human and animal, d'Aulnoy and Unger reflect on the debates about the animal–human divide and the philosophers who framed them. The authors use metamorphosis to blur the animal–human boundaries of their heroines and explore through philosophy their route to fully realized humanity.

Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's "Babiole"

"Babiole" appeared in the second collection of d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, the *Contes Nouveaux ou Les Fées à la Mode*, (1698) and reflects many of the salon interests apparent in d'Aulnoy's and the other *conteuses'* tales: the royal trappings are

opulent; courtly etiquette and attire are observed; adherence to socially prescribed behavior is expected; the main characters are royal and aristocratic, possessed of beauty, charm, and intelligence; and the plot is driven by a love story that usually ends in marriage.

One of the most prominent features of d'Aulnoy's tales is her use of metamorphosis: characters in twelve of her twenty-five *contes* experience an altered state (Seifert, "Animal-Human Hybridity" 245). Although it is typically male characters who are subject metamorphosis, "Babirole" is one of her three tales with heroines metamorphosed into animals, along with "La chatte blanche" ("The White Cat") and "La biche au bois" ("The Doe in the Woods"). Hosford has established a connection between metamorphosis and philosophical discussions around animal-human proximity when he observes that metamorphosis is "emblematic of the anthropomorphic fluidity typical of fairy tales and reveals the proximity of human and nonhuman animals in the popular imagination of seventeenth-century France" (524). Domna Stanton and Lewis Seifert see in metamorphosis a questioning of "the boundaries separating the human and the nonhuman most especially" (100), while Anne Birberick views metamorphosis as a way to explore the social hierarchy and, in the case of "Babirole," interrogate ideas about an "inferior body" and women's inferior social status (94).

D'Aulnoy's veritable *bestiaire féérique* (Birberick 93) features over 124 different types of animals, with monkeys appearing in at least twelve of her other tales.⁹ So why does d'Aulnoy choose to metamorphose her protagonist into a guenon (a she-monkey) in "Babirole"? The contemporary definition of *guenon* at the time of d'Aulnoy's writing gives some clues. According to Antoine Furetière's 1690 *Dictionnaire universel*, *guenon* is defined as (a) a petite female monkey that aristocratic women enjoy feeding and (b) a term used to insult old or ugly women.¹⁰ Birberick has convincingly argued that the definitions of *guenon* are significant in two ways: the first definition "situates the guenon within a cultural context, not in its natural habitat but in its social role as a pet" and the second definition "establishes a link, based on physical appearance between guenons and women." Birberick goes on to suggest, "[The] ramifications extend even further, since the analogy implies that women, or at least unattractive women, occupy an inferior position because of their supposed animality or proximity to animals. In having Babirole metamorphose into a guenon, d'Aulnoy has selected an animal that is clearly marked as feminine and whose status allows her to comment indirectly on the place of women in society" (96). Because of the double entendre of *guenon*, Seifert has proposed that "the heroine's adventures can be read as those of a literal monkey and an ugly woman" (249). We shall see how the double meaning proves to be significant, but now first to the story:

An unnamed queen laments her childlessness. The evil fairy Fanferluche appears and foretells that an *infanta* will be born but orders the queen to fasten a hawthorn sprig to the child's head immediately after birth. Although she is born "the loveliest creature" ("la plus belle créature"), the baby transforms into a *guenon* the moment the sprig is attached. In despair and fearing ridicule, the queen has the monkey boxed and dispatches a servant to drown her in the river. Riding by, the queen's sister and her son, the prince, unwittingly buy "the prettiest she-monkey that ever was" ("la plus jolie *guenon* qui ait jamais été") for the prince and name her "Babiolo." Babiolo is taught to walk on two legs, is dressed every day as a princess and, at age four, begins to speak. Stories of the marvelous Babiolo reach the widowed monkey king Magot, who sends emissaries to seek her hand. Babiolo considers Magot "a monster" ("un vilain monstre") and, after declaring her love for her cousin, she flees the palace. She is captured by Magot's entourage as they are returning home. Unknowingly, they enter the realm of Babiolo's mother and after a tearful reunion, the queen mother, once again fearing embarrassment, decides to imprison Babiolo in the castle. Another escape ensues and Babiolo enters a desert, where she languishes without food or water. Using Magot's betrothal gift—a hazelnut and an olive—to quench her hunger and thirst, the *guenon* Babiolo is disenchanted into a human as a magical palace appears around her. Her cousin, the prince, enters her kingdom, hoping to gain her love. When Babiolo runs into a wood in despair about the prince's injuries sustained in a jousting tournament, Fanferluche reappears, kidnaps her to a cloud and causes her imprisonment in a bottle. The tale ends when the *infanta* is rescued by her cousin; she reconciles with her mother and the prince and princess marry.

From the outset, the reader may wonder if the *guenon* Babiolo has any of the traits for humanness that Descartes proposes. His first criterion is intelligence. Initially, Babiolo, as a pet, is solidly in the animal realm, and her treatment at the hands of the members of the court emphasizes the first meaning of *guenon*. Her cousin names her "Babiolo" (meaning "trinket" or "plaything") and beautifies his toy monkey daily by dressing her as a princess, alluding to and overcoming the second meaning of *guenon*. The members of the court do not question her animality, but rather attempt to suppress, camouflage, or ignore it. They make the monkey ape the human, as she is groomed in manner and attire to be a humanlike as possible. Babiolo is also humanlike in another way: "[H]er sparkling eyes indicated so much intelligence" ("la vivacité de ses yeux marquait tant d'esprit"; Zipes 440; Aulnoy 447) that her aunt brings in teachers "who tested the powers of her intellect most thoroughly" ("qui

exercèrent bien la vivacité de son esprit”). Seifert wonders to what extent d’Aulnoy embraces Descartes’s idea that intelligence is restricted to humans when he asks, “Is that ‘vivacité’ (liveliness) in her eyes the sign of her essential humanity (assuming intelligence is an exclusively human trait), or instead is it a capacity shared among *all* animals, humans and nonhumans alike?” (249). As the story progresses, Babiole’s intelligence becomes ever more apparent (see fig. 1¹¹).

For Descartes, the outward manifestation of intelligence is the use of language, with which an individual is able to reason. D’Aulnoy petitions in “Babiole” for Pliny’s position that animals clearly have their own language—even though they may require “interpreters.” In preparation for courting Babiole, for example, the king Magot remarks that he can easily make his wishes known to his prime minister, but “he would have had great trouble in expressing them if not for the assistance of several *parrots and magpies*” (“mais il en aurait eu d’infinies à les exprimer, sans le secours des *perroquets et des pies*,” Zipes 441; Aulnoy 448; my emphasis). Descartes argued specifically that parrots and magpies might have the speech organs to reproduce the sounds of human speech but were nonetheless incapable of “declarative speech”—the ability to “use words or put together other signs, as we do in order to declare our thoughts to others” (Descartes 45; qtd. in Hatfield).¹² When the parrot in the story delivers the king’s message “in the prettiest voice in the world” (“d’un ton de voix le plus joli du monde,” Zipes 442; Aulnoy 449), d’Aulnoy rejects the Cartesian notion of animal/human mutual unintelligibility. And when Magot’s ambassador tells Babiole his sovereign’s proposal “in the grumbling language used in Magotia” (“en grommelant, qui est la langue dont on se sert en Magotie,” Zipes 446; Aulnoy 454), she has no difficulty understanding his unwelcome offer. Babiole’s own language ability emerges when she reaches the age of four; she first starts to babble and then to speak “in a voice so clear and distinct that every word was intelligible” (“avec une petite voix douce et claire, si distincte, que l’on n’en perdait pas un mot,” Zipes 440; Aulnoy 447). The assembled crowd exclaims, “‘Marvelous!’ ‘Babiole can talk!’ ‘Babiole a creature with reason!’” (“Quelle merveille! Babiole parlante, Babiole raisonnante!”). Both Babiole and the other animals have language, are capable of reason, and use declarative speech.

D’Aulnoy next explores Descartes’s notion that animals’ lack of an immortal soul makes them incapable of feeling pain or emotions. These ideas intersect most notably in Babiole’s interactions with the prince. When the prince comes to play and “moralize” with her (suggesting reason), the narrator tells us that “Babiole had a heart, and that heart had not been transformed like the rest of her little body. Therefore, she became deeply attached to the prince” (“Babiole avait un cœur, et ce cœur n’avait pas été métamorphosé comme le reste de sa



Fig. 1. The monkey-princess Babiolo encounters the river god Biroqua in *Les Contes des fées, ou les enchantemens des bonnes et mauvaises fées* par Madame d'Aulnoy (1810). In the seventeenth century, almost no one in Europe had seen a living primate; this illustrator would have to draw his inspiration from Samuel Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625), the first compendium of descriptions of simians by travelers and explorers. Drawing on Purchas's images and d'Aulnoy's text, he presents us with the fully attired monkey-princess Babiolo. See Moran, *Between Primates and Primitives*.

petite personne: elle prit donc de la tendresse pour le prince,” Zipes 440–41; Aulnoy 448). That Babiole has a heart may seem an innocuous statement to a modern reader but most likely resonated with readers in d’Aulnoy’s time: According to Descartes (among others), the heart is the seat of the emotions *and* the soul.¹³ Like the intelligence in her eyes, her possession of a heart/soul establishes her humanity from the outset, since it had not “been transformed.” When the prince ridicules her statement of love, she responds, “You’re lucky, my lord, that I’m not at all like a monkey in temperament. A [she-]monkey would have already scratched out your eyes, bitten off your nose, and torn off your ears” (“Vous êtes heureux, seigneur ... que je n’ai pas tout à fait l’esprit d’une guenuche; une autre que moi vous aurait déjà crevé les yeux, mordu le nez, arraché les oreilles,” Zipes 444; Aulnoy 453). Although Babiole cannot know that she has been metamorphosed, her ability to reason, her emotional capacity, and her recognition of her animal urges make her aware that her true self is something other or beyond her simian state.

Babiole most clearly recognizes the ambiguity of her hybrid status when she returns to the palace with Magot’s entourage and the queen asks her to tell of her adventures. Her response encapsulates everything that would make her human in Descartes’s design:

What am I to feel when I see myself in a looking glass, a little, ugly black creature with paws covered with hair, a tail, and teeth always ready to bite, and at the same time knowing that I have a mind, that I possess some taste, refinement, and feeling!... [B]y a miracle that astonished everybody I found that I had the power of speech and reason. (Zipes 449–50)

Car enfin, que puis-je ressentir lorsque je me vois dans mon miroir, petite, laide et noire, ayant des pattes couvertes de poils, avec une queue et des dents toujours prêtes à mordre. et que d’ailleurs je ne manque point d’esprit, que j’ai du gout, de la délicatesse et des sentiments?... [E]t par un prodige dont tout le monde fut également surprise, la parole et la raison me vinrent. (Aulnoy 459)

What remains to make her humanity manifest is the restoration of her human form. When Babiole remembers the olive and hazel nut and bites into them, “she made herself so beautiful that no one in the universe could match her looks” (“[e]lle se rendit sur-le-champ si belle, que rien dans l’univers ne pouvait l’égaliser,” Zipes 451; Aulnoy 462). Her outward appearance is now commensurate with her status as human: she has demonstrated intelligence, language, reason, and feeling, and thereby fulfilled Descartes’s requirements for humanity.

Beyond Descartes's requirements, Babiole has also made herself beautiful, an attribute that transcends physical appearance,¹⁴ as Furetière's 1690 dictionary entry for "beauty" makes clear: "Beauty is said to be of spiritual and moral things.... The beauty of the mind, of feelings, is more estimable than that of the body" ("On dit que la beauté est des choses spirituelles et morales.... La beauté de l'esprit, les sentiments est plus estimable que celui du corps").¹⁵ Whether a monkey or an uncomely woman, the final disenchantment of d'Aulnoy's guenon promotes her to status, dignity, and full humanity. D'Aulnoy has used Descartes's parameters for humanness to elevate her female character from an inferior social position and argues for ungendered human reason and the rational equality of human beings.

In her tale, d'Aulnoy cloaks Descartes's philosophy by keeping to the fantastic spirit of the *conte*. Babiole is subject to magical events: a fairy's curse transforms her into a guenon, and magical gifts transform her into a human. Regaining her human form is not the result of any virtuous act or moral changes in Babiole, but rather her maturation and the linear development of the features Descartes's program requires for humanness. When a monkey-princess returns 106 year later in Friederike Helene Unger's tale, "Prinzessin Gräcula," virtuous and moral changes do play a role, and the ideas of a different philosopher chart the monkey princess's journey to full humanity.

Friederike Helene Unger's "Prinzessin Gräcula"

Friederike Helene Unger (1751¹⁶–1809) was one of the most beloved and talented writers of her day. She wrote in many genres—novels, short stories, essays, historical memoirs, and even a few fairy tales—and she was active as a reviewer and editor.¹⁷ In keeping with social prescriptions to write "useful, moral, and popular literature,"¹⁸ Unger's publications also included a treasured cookbook, a *Naturkalender zur Unterhaltung der heranwachsenden Jugend* (*Nature Calendar for the Entertainment of Youth*) and a *Vaterländisches Lesebuch für Land- und Soldatenschulen* (*Patriotic Reader for Rural and Military Schools*). Unger was also extremely active as a cultural mediator and translated works from English and French, a language and culture she knew intimately.¹⁹ Her first publication, in 1782, of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (*J. J. Rousseau's Bekenntnisse*, 1782) and his *Rêveries* (*J. J. Rousseau's Selbstgespräche auf einsamen Spaziergängen. Ein Anhang zu den Bekenntnissen*, 1782), earned her the reputation as a Rousseau expert among her contemporaries. For the next ten years, she translated the works of well-known writers of the Ancien Régime (e.g., Molière, Marivaux, and Beaumarchais, among others), and her adaptations of their stage plays were regularly performed in Germany.²⁰ Of her eight novels,²¹ the first appeared five years before the French Revolution, the last in 1809 under

the Napoleonic occupation of Prussia. Most scholars describe Unger's literary production in terms of its reception of contemporary gender roles, the image of femininity, and Unger's response to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 1796), the quint-essential *Bildungsroman*.²²

The publishing house she shared with her husband, Johann Friedrich Unger, became the main venue for the canonical greats of German literature,²³ the early Romantics, and even the literary avant-garde. As a result of hosting politicians and writers in her home²⁴ and corresponding with other publishers, intellectuals, authors, artists, and people from the theater, she was well acquainted with the cultural and philosophical discussions of her day. Through her work in the Unger publishing house, her familiarity with the literary trends and ideas circulating in Western Europe around 1800 were unparalleled. References and allusions to philosophers and writers, as well as to contemporary musical, theatrical, and literary works, often found their way into her texts. Despite her great success as an author and the excellent reputation of the publishing company, Unger was unable to save the hopelessly indebted enterprise and died impoverished in 1813.

"Prinzessin Gräcula" is a tale embedded in Unger's fifth novel, *Albert und Albertine* (1804), that takes direct aim at the intellectual and literary salons of the Early Romantics. The frame narrative tells the love story of the newlywed Albertine,²⁵ whose husband is away at war. She accidentally meets Albert and invites him to meet her uncle, who presides over a literary circle—a salon—filled with Goethe enthusiasts; they venerate the great genius by preserving his toothpick. Albert becomes a member of the "the ridiculous club" ("den ridicülen Klub," 60) and is called upon one evening to amuse the group with a story. He recounts the tale of Prinzessin Gräcula, the namesake of a type of rose Pliny described: the tightly rolled petals of the flower have to be forcefully pried opened before the flower can unfurl and emit a fragrance. "Prinzessin Gräcula" chronicles the events that lead to its heroine's unfurling:

The childless royal couple, the gluttonous king Fricando and his beautiful queen Sentimentale, live in the as yet unexplored "realm of fantasy" (Gebiete der Phantasie). Sentimentale longs for a child and convinces Fricando to travel with her to the priest of the oracle, Frivolo, to seek an answer to their barrenness. Frivolo willingly helps resolve their dilemma. As the royal entourage heads home, they come upon the house of the Waldmutter, who foretells that the queen will bear a daughter wondrously beautiful, wondrously intelligent and hopefully wondrously good. Back in their realm, Sentimentale bears the child and names her Gräcula. Frivolo and the Waldmutter appear among other guests at the christening.

When Gräcula turns fifteen, the Waldmutter appears and offers to serve as Gräcula's governess. Gräcula ridicules her and declines the offer. Following a small snake, she soon loses her way in the castle grounds and falls into the clutches of two maidens of unearthly beauty, Wollust (lust) and Üppigkeit (voluptuousness). After a period of debauchery, Gräcula eventually runs off with the beautiful dancer Salto. They encounter the Waldmutter, who transforms Salto into an ape and Gräcula into a long-tailed monkey. Transported in a box to an island, they encounter several other metamorphized apes, dogs, cats, birds and other creatures and Gräcula, now called "Babiolo," is metamorphized again, this time into a petite tailless ape. Babiolo recognizes several familiar characters from her past among the creatures and tells them the events of her own metamorphosis. Frivolo and her parents appear as she ends her story. The Waldmutter also returns and sets one more test of virtue for the princess, whom she transforms into a marble statue standing in the palace courtyard; Sentimentale becomes the dove that rests on her shoulder as the subjects of the realm come to wonder at and slander the statue. After an extended period of time, the Waldmutter, now called a fairy, finally reappears. A crack of thunder ends the metamorphosis and Gräcula transforms from the statue into a human, rechristened "Sophia" ("Wisdom"), who rules wisely over her kingdom and, in the very last paragraph, marries a worthy man.

In "Prinzessin Gräcula," Unger examines Rousseau's philosophy as it outlines humankind's intellectual and moral progress toward civilization. Her choice of the simian is important, not only because she draws with it parallels to d'Aulnoy's "Babiolo," but also because the monkey was precisely the creature occupying Rousseau's thoughts about humankind and our evolution. Unger's text explores Rousseau's concept of perfectibility, taking Gräcula through two simian transformations on her path to adulthood: first as a long-tailed monkey—clearly an animal in Rousseau's paradigm—and then as a tailless ape—an incomplete human, higher up on the *scala naturae*, as yet unperfected.

Unlike Babiolo, whose metamorphosis occurs immediately after birth, Gräcula's first transformation transpires when she is an adolescent, so we initially assume she is clearly in the human realm. And yet, as in "Babiolo," there are several points in the tale where the heroine's status as human is in question and remains ambiguous until her final disenchantment into Sophia. Is she conceived an ape? Is she born an ape? Has she always been an ape? When Sentimentale arrives home expectant after visiting the oracle, many gossiped that Frivolo's gift was actually a monkey. With Gräcula's first cries, some heard Mozart cantilenas, while older women watched to see "if the newborn ape was also very aggressive" ("ob der neugeborne Affe auch sehr grimmig sei?")

79).²⁶ Masters brought in to teach her, encounter her “young beastly staring eye” (“jung tierisch stierende[s] Auge,” 83). When she ultimately stands as a marble statue in the castle’s courtyard, the first spectators pondering the statue’s proportions exclaim, “What!... this perfect beauty is supposed to be the monster Gräcula? – Those gently curved arms! Hers reached to her heels! And that mouth, open slightly like a delicate rosebud! The princess’s mouth looked was like it was formed in Africa!” (“Wie!... diese vollendete Schönheit wäre die Unholdin Gräcula? – Diese zierlich gerundeten Arme! Jener reichen ja die Hände bis an der Ferse! Und dieser Mund, hold sich öffnend, wie eine zarte Rosenknospe! Der Prinzessin Mund war wie in Afrika geformt,” 117–18.) The descriptions highlight the ambiguity surrounding Gräcula’s state before her simian metamorphosis and her human form at her disenchantment, and while the embedded spectators’ reactions reflect the association of black Africans with apes in Unger’s time,²⁷ their overt racism jars a modern reader’s sensibilities.

The period before Gräcula’s first metamorphosis describes challenges to her perfection. The Waldmutter, the sibyllic mediator between Gräcula and her mother, acts and speaks throughout the tale as a mouthpiece for Rousseauian ideas.²⁸ When she first meets Sentimentale and foretells the impending birth, she admonishes Sentimentale to raise her daughter according to Rousseau’s precepts: wondrously beautiful, wondrously intelligent, but also wondrously good, a moral individual. She warns Sentimentale to shield Gräcula from immoral temptations of drink and the flesh, “the rosebushes of lust” (“d[ie] Rosengebüschen der Wollust”) and “the pearls of the frothy goblet” (“die Perle des schäumenden Bechers,” 77). In her attempts to educate Gräcula, Sentimentale has other plans. She says she intends to study Rousseau and Campe²⁹ (a pedagogue and social reformer) and rely on Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont for guidance and to judge how well Gräcula is developing, Sentimentale summons a phrenologist³⁰ to court. His verdict is damning: Gräcula’s capacity for independent thought and her ability to make sound judgments are extremely limited; she can only parrot back ideas she’s been spoon-fed. But, beyond all that, she has only a hard pebble where her heart should be. At this point, she is clearly far from being perfected.

In Rousseau’s system, Gräcula can become more perfected by exercising self-rule and making moral progress. The first opportunity comes when she turns fifteen; the Waldmutter offers to become her governess because Gräcula’s sensuality is awakening and she stands at a crossroads. Instead, Gräcula ignores her counsel and follows the Edenic snake into the grotto where Wollust and Üppigkeit³¹ prowl—the very temptations about which the Waldmutter had earlier warned. Once Gräcula has abandoned herself to earthly pleasures and flees with Salto, the stage is set for her first metamorphosis because she

has shown none of the qualities that Rousseau outlines for perfectibility. The Waldmutter, declaring Gräcula to blame for her situation, transforms her into a “foolish” (“törichtiger”) *tailed* monkey and Salto into an ape.

As Gräcula finds herself transported to the island and perceives her transformed state, the Waldmutter’s voice offers encouragement that will lead to her perfection: “Don’t despair! Watch! Observe! Learn! You will be rewarded for every ounce of betterment and self-awareness” (“Verzweifle nicht! Siehe! Beobachte! Lerne! Jeder Grad von Veredlung und Selbsterkenntnis wird dir zugerechnet,” 102). Gräcula, now a “little monster” (“Ungeheuerchen”), Rousseau’s chimeric cross between human and monkey, “thinks hard” (“[dachte] denkt ganz ernstlich nach”) and recognizes that her previous metamorphosis into a long-tailed monkey—an animal—was the result of her own failing and deficiencies; she becomes self-aware and decides to follow the suggestion to listen and learn. Her decision has an immediate impact: she once again metamorphoses, this time into a more evolved simian, a sweet little tailless ape, whom the Waldmutter addresses as “Babiolo.”

As a tailless ape, Gräcula is now Rousseau’s *homme sauvage*, an incomplete human, who had not yet developed her potential faculties, nor acquired any degree of perfection, and is still found in the primitive state of nature (the island among fellow creatures). During the narration of her metamorphosis and “sparing no details” (“ohne sich im mindestens zu schonen”), Babiolo undergoes an additional transformation that takes her ever closer to her humanity and disenchantment: she recognizes that she is human in her simian state and feels her heart: “[T]he pebble in her chest has disappeared with her *being human*; she believed now to feel a real, warm, tender, flesh and blood heart, because, when she thinks of her parents, she always feels a flutter that brings tears to her eyes.” (“[D]er Kiesel in ihrer Brust sei *mit ihrem Menschsein* verschwunden; sie glaube, jetzt wirklich ein wahres, fleischernes, warmes, weiches Herz in sich zu verspüren; denn wenn sie ihrer Eltern gedenke, fühle sie immer ein Wallen, wovon ihr Auge nass würde,” 112; emphasis added). Her recognition of her heartless behavior toward her parents is another step toward her greater moral reckoning.

This moment of self-awareness—the role Babiolo/Gräcula has played in her metamorphosis—brings her to the penultimate transformation. Frivolo declares that her “forthright confession” (“offnes Geständnis”) is “an important step toward [her] perfection,” (“ein wichtiger Schritt zu [ihrer] Veredlung,” 113). The Waldmutter subjects her to one more test “to develop her character” (“[ihre] Anlagen [zu] entwickeln,” 115) and, frozen in effigy, Gräcula stands as the statue in the courtyard. Passing the final test of her virtue by silently enduring the slander of her subjects, she emerges as the human princess Sophia, the reward for her incremental steps toward perfection.

At the conclusion of “Gräcula,” Unger departs from d’Aulnoy’s *contes* model: there is no mention of Sophia’s physical appearance or beauty, and the love story is completely lacking—that Sophia marries (in the very last paragraph to a character never previously mentioned) is simply a nod to the denouements of the *conteuses*’ tales. I argue that Unger, in the first wave of female fairy-tale writers in Germany, anticipates the agenda of subsequent women’s tales: the heroine takes an active role in her ultimate transformation and does so without magical or male aid.³²

Conclusion

D’Aulnoy’s and Unger’s tales engage the philosophies of Descartes and Rousseau as those men pondered what faculties constituted humanness. While the plots of the stories at first glance appear to have very little in common, other than the monkey–princess’s metamorphosis, both deal with the same theme: how the heroines are elevated to the fullness of their humanity; metamorphosis is the vehicle to explore the changes they undergo.

Although the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which d’Aulnoy and Unger wrote differ and are separated by a century, their status as writers and their literary products were judged in similar ways. The attitudes of male contemporaries regarding the choice of genre for women’s literary production echo across the centuries. In France, the fairy tale was considered a “frivolous minor literary genre” (Feat 237), generally unworthy of critical attention; tales were “childish” and obeyed “neither rhyme nor reason” (Stanton and Seifert 34). Critics disparaged the writers for “excessive use of the marvelous” that “betray[ed] an incapacity or an unwillingness to tackle serious matters.” Becker-Cantarino, describing the situation in Germany in Unger’s time, likewise cites prescriptions but also restrictions on the choice of genre for women, as evidenced by the comments of philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814). Writing in 1796, Fichte “sternly restricts women’s writing to certain types of texts, to useful, moral, popular literature.... He directs women to serve their own sex only and explicitly bars them from what he and men of letters of his age considered to be the male domain of scientific or philosophical works” (Becker-Cantarino 82).

So, writing in a “frivolous minor genre,” d’Aulnoy’s bold act is to “tackle” the serious matter of the inferior status of women. Unger, for her part, could accede to Fichte’s prescription to “serve her own sex only” because fairy tales were considered both popular literature and a genre for women and children. But, despite men’s pronouncements, d’Aulnoy and Unger engage in their own philosophical musings. They exhibit a profound understanding of the philosophies they use to develop their heroines’ life stories. And just as they adhere

to social prescriptions for their work, they challenge the philosophers' vision of women as *incomplete*. Exploiting Descartes's and Rousseau's philosophies to show their characters and themselves as thinking, feeling, and reasoning beings, self-conscious, rational, and moral, d'Aulnoy and Unger eliminate the boundaries that separate women from full humanity and use *declarative speech* to claim their rightful place in the evolution of ungendered humankind.

Notes

1. See Erica Harth for further discussion of seventeenth-century women's reception of Descartes's ideas. Jane Spencer has argued that "Descartes' insistence on the rational capacity of human beings, their ability to seek out the truths of the universe through the operations of a mind all shared in common, held liberating potential for women. Cartesian thought ... offered the opportunity for women to shake off those old ideas tying the female to the animal body" (433).
2. In her study of women writers between 1770 and 1830, von Felden found twenty-seven German-speaking authors who referred in some way to Rousseau.
3. See Hosford for a description of views of the animal-human divide from antiquity to Descartes's time.
4. According to Hosford, the notion of "theriophily, a set of beliefs asserting that nonhuman animals are rational, better endowed by nature, and more moral than humans" stood in opposition to Descartes. Michel de Montaigne, the foremost representative of the tradition, posited "that one could hardly blame animals for the human inability to understand them" (Hosford 518). Hosford cites an example from d'Aulnoy, the tale of "La chatte blanche": "Despite the anthropocentric claims of Cartesian theory, of which Mme. d'Aulnoy was undoubtedly aware, this cat can reason in two languages, and, in the theriophilic tradition ... it is not the fault of the nonhumans that the human cannot understand them. Indeed, the cat shows her reason to be superior to that of the prince. She recognizes the linguistic divide, and, rather than blaming the prince, chooses to speak to him in French, a politeness that he is unable to reciprocate by speaking the language of cats" (524).
5. See Noble and Robert Wokler ("The Ape Debates" and "Perfectible Apes") for detailed discussions surrounding these propositions.
6. See Francis Moran, "Of Pongos and Men," for a discussion of the concerns of eighteenth-century natural philosophers and the Enlightenment preoccupation with "arranging species along a continuum descending from God and linking each part of His creation" (652).
7. Quoted in Moran, "Of Pongos and Men" 641-42. See also Roland Borgards for a discussion of Rousseau's thought experiments on this topic and Jan Habermehl for an overview of literary treatments of the ape image.
8. See Colin Allen, section 7, "Special Topics in the Study of Animal Consciousness."
9. Although not necessarily main characters, monkeys appear in Anne Thackeray-Ritchie's 1892 collection of d'Aulnoy's tales in "Fair Goldilocks," "Bluebird," "Prince Ariel," "Princess Rosette," "Princess Mayblossom," "The Bee and the Orange Tree," "The Good Little Mouse," "The Ram," "The Green Serpent," "The White Cat," "Babiolo," and "The Dolphin."

10. The exact entry in Furetière's dictionary is quoted by Kathryn Bastin: "Petit singe femelle que les Dames de qualité prennent plaisir de nourrir. On appelle aussi guenon, une femme vieille ou laide, quand on luy veut dire quelque injure" (86).
11. In the seventeenth century, almost no one in Europe had seen a living primate; this illustrator would have to draw his inspiration from Samuel Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625), the first compendium of descriptions of simians by travelers and explorers. Drawing on Purchas's images and d'Aulnoy's text, he presents us with the fully attired monkey-princess Babiole. See Moran, *Between Primates and Primitives*.
12. Quoted by Robert Lurz, n.p.
13. See "History of the Location of the Soul" and *The History of the Heart*.
14. See Birberick, who discusses "the incongruity between physical appearance (animal body/*parâître*) and inner nature (human qualities/*être*)" in "Babiole" (95).
15. Quoted in Bastin 99.
16. The details of Unger's birth and childhood have been the subject of much speculation. According to Birte Giesler, dates for her birth range from 1711, 1741, 1751, and 1753. The information from Mark Lehmstedt's extensive archival work on Unger makes 1751 the most likely date.
17. See Giesler for a full listing of Unger's works (311ff.).
18. Barbara Becker-Cantarino discusses what Unger's contemporaries, especially the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, considered "appropriate" female literary activity as prescribed by the leading "thinkers" of Unger's time (82).
19. French may have been her first language, as suggested in a letter that Lehmstedt quotes. Other biographers and scholars have speculated that she was trained in French by the wife of the local minister.
20. See Anne Fleig's introduction to Unger's *Der Mondkaiser* for a discussion of Unger's play translations and a history of their reception in Germany.
21. Spokiene has advocated including a ninth novel, *Bekanntnisse eine Giftmischerin von ihr selbst geschrieben* (*Confessions of a Poisoner, in Her Own Words*). See the introduction and notes to her 2009 edition.
22. Unlike "Gräcula," Unger's only other known fairy tale, the stand-alone "Prinz Bimbam" (1802), has received much scholarly attention, especially as a parody of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.
23. For example, Unger published Friedrich Schlegel's Shakespeare translations, still used today, and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.
24. Although she has occasionally been described as a *salonnière*, Unger was explicitly *not* a member of the salons held by Berlin's Jewish women; her exclusion from their circles led to a ferocious feud that found its way into many of Unger's texts. *Albert und Albertine* constitutes a frontal assault on their salons. See Susanne Zantop's afterword to *Albert und Albertine* for a fuller description of the feud between the early Romantics and Unger.
25. Zantop sees the protagonist Albertine, "uninhibited, genuine, well-educated, and refined" ("unbefangen, natürlich, geistvoll-gebildet, geschmacksicher") as Unger's self-portrait and the enthusiastic fans of the poet Wassermann as the Berlin Romantics.
26. All translations are mine.
27. See Zantop's study of precolonial Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. At the time, Unger wrote "Gräcula," anthropologists,

- philosophers, and natural historians were attempting to define the parameters of *race*. As Zantop has stated, “[T]he association of blacks with apes, and the idea of an ‘allegorical plan of creation’—from the orangutan upward to the Calmuck to the European to the classical Greek, or downward ‘from the most beautiful European woman to the ugliest Caffer’—became a fixed element in late-eighteenth-century anthropological discourse and pictorial representations” (75).
28. The Waldmutter also represents the “tutor” in Rousseau’s model of education. Just as “Gräcula” outlines Rousseau’s steps to perfection, the narrative also addresses Rousseau’s steps toward educating the child, all mediated through a mentor. See Christopher Bertram, “Education.”
 29. Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818) was a German writer, linguist, publisher, and educational reformer. His most famous work was *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter* (*Fatherly Advice for My Daughter*, 1789).
 30. *Phrenology*, the pseudoscience for predicting mental and personality traits, was developed by the German physician Franz Joseph Gall in 1796 and was highly popular at the time Unger wrote “Gräcula.”
 31. See Angela Steidele for a discussion of lesbian interactions in Unger’s work.
 32. See Shawn C. Jarvis, “Trivial Pursuit” and “The Vanished Woman.”

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