

Introduction

La Belle et la Bête and “The Other Voice”

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe series aims to make known the works of early modern women writers (and the men who supported them) whose contributions to Western society have been silenced and/or forgotten. How, then, does *La Belle et la Bête* or *Beauty and the Beast* align with this goal? More than 250 years after its initial publication, this classic story is one of the most popular fairy tales in the Western world, continuing to spark the imagination of audiences everywhere; theatrical plays, musicals, an Oscar-nominated animated film, and a recent live action film continue to retell this enchanting story. But while Disney brands it a “tale as old as time,” Elizabeth Wanning Harries reminds us that “all fairy tales have a history,” and that “they are anything but ageless or timeless.”¹ Indeed, it was a French noblewoman in the mid-eighteenth century, Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, who first imagined and crafted the story that has become so famous.² And yet as the author of this powerfully compelling literary tale, she herself remains unknown to the general public, even to scholars, while the adaptations and translations based on her fairy tale are universally recognized and celebrated today.

In contrast to the ‘ageless classic’ beloved by today’s readers and audiences, *La Belle et la Bête* began its life modestly—and anonymously. Villeneuve made this decision not just as a woman in an era of predominantly male authorship, but as a member of the nobility who might have thought it below her station to be engaged in such commercial activity. In choosing to try her hand at the literary fairy tale, Villeneuve was working in a genre that had been associated with women writers since it was launched by aristocratic women in the 1690s. As Lewis C. Seifert notes, this was a “(rare) literary movement dominated by women,” one that allowed its aristocratic participants to imagine what Patricia

1. Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

2. The Aarne-Thompson-Uther index of folk tale types gives “Beauty and the Beast” narratives their own entry (ATU Tale Type 425C) as a variant of Tale Type 425, “The Search for the Lost Husband.” Virginia E. Swain points out, however, that “in a reversal of the more frequent pattern,” the oral tradition of stories about animal bridegrooms “did not influence the literary fairy tale. Instead, Villeneuve’s original story ... has made a lasting mark on folk narrative.” See Virginia E. Swain, “Beauty and the Beast,” in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, ed. Donald Haase (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2008), 1:104. Swain’s article goes on to discuss the folk tale variants of the story and their place in the ATU index (106). The Aarne-Thompson-Uther Classification of Folk Tales can be accessed on the *Multilingual Folk Tale Database* at <<http://www.mftd.org/index.php?action=atu>>.

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Hannon calls “fabulous identities” for both their heroines and themselves.³ While the *conteuses* or women fairy-tale writers portrayed their own productions as “frivolous” and “trifling” to counter the hostility of the male-dominated literary world, their fictions expanded the limited destinies available to women through the invention of magical, marvelous, and fairy universes in which women held great sway. Villeneuve’s famous story partakes of this tradition while responding to the unique marital concerns facing early modern women; her female protagonist confronts a hostile world and responds heroically according to the ideals of early modern France.

This modern English edition of Villeneuve’s *La Belle et la Bête* offers readers for the first time the *texte intégral* of the original fairy tale, including the story frame, the dedication, and preface that accompanied its publication in the eighteenth century. My hope is that readers will come to appreciate Villeneuve’s first rendering of *La Belle et la Bête* not simply as an “ageless classic” of popular culture, but as a bona fide work of world literature.

*Life and Works of Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve*⁴

Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot was born in Paris, in 1685, into a powerful and noble Protestant family from La Rochelle; her birth notice also lists her mother, Susanne Allaire, as Protestant. In the same year, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had protected the rights of Protestants to practice their religion in the French kingdom since 1598. And although Gabrielle-Suzanne was baptized in the Catholic religion, her family—like many other prominent Protestant families of the period—most likely took this step as a legal precaution to establish a record of her civil status.⁵

3. See Lewis C. Seifert, “On Fairy Tales, Subversion, and Ambiguity: Feminist Approaches to Seventeenth-Century *Contes de fées*,” in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, ed. Donald Haase (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 54, and Patricia Hannon, *Fabulous Identities: Women’s Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 16.

4. I am indebted to the biographical research of Marie Laure Girou Swiderski, which corrected much of the misinformation about Villeneuve’s life: see “La Belle ou la Bête? Madame de Villeneuve, la méconnue,” in *Femmes savantes et femmes d’esprit: Women Intellectuals of the French Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roland Bonnel and Catherine Rubinger (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 99–128. I also rely on the informative biographical details provided by Éliisa Biancardi in her edition of *La Jeune Américaine et les contes marins (La Belle et la Bête); Les Belles Solitaires*. [Followed by] Madame Leprince de Beaumont, *Magasin des enfants (La Belle et la Bête)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), 29–69. Lastly, Barbara Rosmarie Latotzky Cooper has provided ample documentation on Villeneuve’s career and the reception of her works: “Madame de Villeneuve: The Author of ‘La Belle et la Bête’ and her Literary Legacy” (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 1985).

5. As Jennifer L. Palmer notes: “Most prosperous Protestant families took the precaution of having baptismal, marital, and funeral services performed in the Catholic Church, which acted as the

Gabrielle-Suzanne's distinguished family included Amos Barbot (1566–1625), a Peer of France who had been a magistrate at Parliament, deputy of the *États-Généraux* in 1614, and one of the first historians of the city of La Rochelle.⁶ His brother Jean was mayor of La Rochelle in 1610. Later in the century, another relative, Jean Barbot (1655–1712), became an explorer and commercial agent on slave ships going to Guinea and America. He wrote and illustrated an extensive journal of his trips in 1678–1679 and 1681–1682 to West Africa, ending with a short section on the transatlantic slave settlements in Guyana and the Antilles. He and his brother Jacques fled to England in 1685 so that they could continue to practice their religion, never to return, and left behind family members persecuted for their Protestant beliefs.⁷ While in England, Jean translated and added to his journals in English. These famous relations, as well as the Barbot family history in La Rochelle, explain in part Gabrielle-Suzanne's great familiarity with the world of shipping and the Atlantic slave trade that frame her tale of *La Belle et la Bête*.

In 1706, the twenty-year-old Gabrielle-Suzanne married Jean-Baptiste Gaalon de Villeneuve, a lieutenant colonel and member of an aristocratic family from Poitou. Both parties were well-matched in rank and wealth, but as the youngest siblings of their families, their settlement was less than might have been expected. Nonetheless, each brought to the newly formed marriage a considerable amount of wealth and property. This happy beginning would quickly dissipate, however. Gabrielle-Suzanne's father had died in 1702, and her mother would successfully sue her four daughters in court for their father's inheritance to pay his debts, being awarded the handsome sum of 50,433 pounds. In addition, her mother reneged on part of Gabrielle-Suzanne's dowry. This forced the young bride to return to her mother the properties she had received from her father's estate: the land and domains of Romagné, les Mottais, and other properties (assessed at 35,500 pounds in 1728).⁸ Then, barely six months into her marriage, Gabrielle-Suzanne was driven to request a financial separation of property from her husband, whom she claimed had squandered a significant portion of their communal wealth through gambling losses and mismanagement. While she obtained this financial separation, she remained married to Jean-Baptiste and gave

gatekeeper of civil and religious personhood: only the sacraments could assure the civil privileges of legitimacy and succession." See Palmer, *Intimate Bonds: Family and Slavery in the French Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 145.

6. Girou Swiderski, "La Belle ou la Bête?" 100. See also Amos Barbot, "Histoire de La Rochelle depuis l'an 1199 jusques en 1575," in *Archives historiques de la Saintonge et de l'Aunis*, vol. 14 (Paris: A. Picard, 1886).

7. See *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa, 1678–1712*, ed. P.E.H. Hair, Adam Jones, and Robin Law, vol. 1 (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992), ix–xiv.

8. These lands were located near La Rochelle, in the parish of Saint-Xandre (named after an early Christian martyr, Saint Candidus). See Louis-Étienne Arcère, *Histoire de la ville de La Rochelle et du pays d'Aunis*, 2 vols. (La Rochelle: René-Jacob Desbordes, 1756), 1:148–49.

birth to a baby girl, Marie Louise Suzanne, in 1708. It is unknown if this child survived. Three years later, in 1711, Villeneuve became a widow at age twenty-six after her husband died in the Spanish city of Pamplona (no information exists about the circumstances of his death).

Between 1715 and 1728, Villeneuve lost her mother and regained part of her family inheritance, but nonetheless scrambled to establish some financial security for herself. As Girou Swiderski chronicles in detail, however, she progressively lost her wealth through loans, bequests to family members, and debts, which she tried to meet by selling off her properties. Villeneuve eventually made her way to Paris, a journey that Girou Swiderski estimates most likely occurred around 1728, when she had definitively lost hope of recuperating the value of her properties;⁹ Biancardi speculates that she may have traveled to Saint-Domingue (the island destination in the narrative frame of *La Belle et la Bête*) before going to Paris.¹⁰ Once she did arrive in the French capital, however, her financial needs must have been significant. Writing became a way to support herself, as few other options existed for noblewomen to make a living in eighteenth-century France.¹¹

While in Paris, Villeneuve met Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (1674–1762), the most famous tragedian and poet of his time, as well as the archenemy of Voltaire. According to the *Biographie universelle*, Crébillon became aware of Villeneuve through his function as the royal literary censor (Maunoir, however, is listed as the censor of her first work, *Le Phénix conjugal* [*The Conjugal Phoenix*], published in 1734).¹² At this point, Crébillon's literary reputation was well-established; he was received into the *Académie Française* in 1731, was awarded the position of literary censor in 1733, and became the royal censor in 1735. Villeneuve's relationship with Crébillon and their subsequent cohabitation, according to Girou Swiderski, entailed a significant loss of class status, but was also “a stroke of luck

9. Girou Swiderski, “La Belle ou la Bête?” 105.

10. See Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 31.

11. Remarriage, retirement to a convent, or serving as a companion to another noblewoman were generally the options available for aristocratic widows.

12. As noted by Claude-Marie Pillet: “Her first literary works made her worthy of the friendship of the author of *Rhadamiste*, responsible for examining them as the censor” (*ses premiers essais littéraires lui méritèrent la bienveillance de l’auteur de Rhadamiste, chargé de les examiner comme censeur*). See the *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, vol. 49 (Paris: Louis-Gabriel Michaud, 1827), 39. Only Villeneuve's bestseller *La Jardinière de Vincennes* (*The Female Gardener of Vincennes*, 1753), however, displays Crébillon's approval as censor; see Cooper, “Madame de Villeneuve,” 12. As Cooper points out, it was possible that Villeneuve had already written *La Jardinière de Vincennes* before she met Crébillon, since we know that Villeneuve did not necessarily publish her works in the order she wrote them. *La Belle et la Bête*, for example, appeared before *Les Belles solitaires* (*The Solitary Beauties*), which Villeneuve claims she wrote in the 1720s. On the order of publication of Villeneuve's works, see Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 58–59. All translations throughout the Introduction are mine unless otherwise stated.

that saved her from poverty” (*une véritable chance, qui la sauvait de la misère*), in addition to “an opportunity to engage her judgment and intellectual and literary skills” (*une possibilité de mettre en usage son jugement et ses aptitudes intellectuelles et littéraires*); she was able not only to launch her own literary career with a respectable measure of success, but she shared with Crébillon his responsibilities as censor, which kept her in touch with the literary trends in Paris.¹³

Crébillon was born into a bourgeois family from Burgundy in 1674. In 1707, he married Marie-Charlotte Péaget, the daughter of an apothecary in Paris, with whom he had two sons. His first son, the future novelist Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (hereafter “Crébillon fils”), was born the same year.¹⁴ His second son, born in 1709, survived only four years.¹⁵ Two years later, in 1711, Crébillon’s beloved wife also died.¹⁶ Widowed and impoverished, since he had dissipated the fortune he had made from his plays, Crébillon raised his young son alone. Early in his career, Crébillon had produced a string of mostly successful plays every three years, but after 1717, his production came almost to a halt. There was a lag of nine years between *Sémiramis* (1717) and *Pyrrhus* (1726), and then twenty-two years between *Pyrrhus* and *Catiline* (1746). In 1754, Crébillon experienced his final success with his tragedy *Le Triumvirat*, performed at the *Comédie-Française*. Given his huge talent, Crébillon’s contemporaries thought him lazy, but also blamed his poor work ethic on his passion for drinking, gambling, and womanizing.¹⁷

Crébillon was an eccentric character: he smoked pipes incessantly (and would not go anywhere he was not allowed to smoke); he remained fairly reclusive in an age of sociability; and he had a soft spot for the stray dogs and cats he rescued in such great numbers that it created a health issue in his home. As Joseph de La Porte wrote in a preface to Crébillon’s collected works in 1774:

All unfortunate souls touched his heart; even animals, especially those that were suffering, elicited his pity. This is why his house was filled with dogs and cats whose appearance and infirmities were a testament to the excess of his compassion.¹⁸

13. Girou Swiderski, “La Belle ou la Bête?,” 106 and 110.

14. Maurice Dutrait, *Étude sur la vie et le théâtre de Crébillon, 1674–1762* (Bordeaux: Cadoret, 1895), 21.

15. Dutrait, *Étude sur la vie*, 38.

16. Dutrait, *Étude sur la vie*, 28.

17. Dutrait, *Étude sur la vie*, 47.

18. “Tous les malheureux avoient des droits sur son cœur; les bêtes mêmes, surtout si elles souffraient, excitaient sa commisération. C’était par ce principe, que sa maison étoit remplie de chiens & de chats, dont la figure & les infirmités prouvoient l’excess de sa compassion.” See Joseph de la Porte, “Éloge historique de M. de Crébillon,” in Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, *Œuvres de Crébillon augmentées de la vie de l’auteur*, new edition, vol. 1 (Paris: Libraires associés, 1774), 52–53.

It was during Crébillon's unproductive years that Villeneuve met him, most likely in the early 1730s, when they were both already mature adults—she in her late forties and Crébillon approaching sixty. Not until 1748 is there documented proof of their cohabitation, which continued until Villeneuve's death in 1755. In January 1748, for example, a police report states that Crébillon “has as his mistress Madame de Villeneuve who performs the role of censor in his place” (*a pour Maitresse Madame de Villeneuve qui censure à sa place*).¹⁹ This is corroborated by a passage from Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie*, in which the libertine author—who received French lessons three times a week from the famous playwright around 1750—described Crébillon's household:

[Monsieur Crébillon] had an old governess, a cook, and a domestic servant. His governess took care of everything, including his money, and made sure he lacked for nothing. He never asked her to account for anything. ... He was a royal censor, and he told me that it amused him. His governess would read him the works brought for his examination, and she would stop reading when she believed something deserved his censure, but sometimes they were of a different opinion, and then their arguments were truly comical. I once heard the governess send away an author, telling him: “Come again next week; we have had no time to examine your manuscript.”²⁰

Here, Casanova refers to Villeneuve as Crébillon's governess, since Villeneuve did take charge of all his household needs, including his finances, which were often unstable, and had his full confidence to do so. Nonetheless, she had also published numerous works and was an active writer in her own right at this time, in addition to sharing Crébillon's censoring responsibilities. The two authors seemed to share a peaceful life, a great sympathy for animals in distress, a mutual respect, and an appreciation for the literary forms of the seventeenth century. Crébillon was an avid reader of novels, the genre at which Villeneuve excelled, even though he wrote plays and poetry.²¹ And from Villeneuve's work,

19. Cooper, “Madame de Villeneuve,” 16.

20. “[Monsieur Crébillon] avait une vieille gouvernante, une cuisinière et un domestique. Sa gouvernante pensait à tout, tenait son argent, et ne le laissait jamais manquer de rien, il ne lui en demandait jamais aucun compte. ... Il était censeur royal, et me disait que cela l'amusaient. Sa gouvernante lui lisait les ouvrages qu'on lui portait, et elle suspendait sa lecture quand elle croyait que cela méritait sa censure; mais parfois ils étaient d'avis différent, et alors leurs contestations étaient vraiment risibles. J'entendis un jour que cette gouvernante renvoyer quelqu'un en lui disant: ‘Revenez la semaine prochaine; nous n'avons pas encore eu le temps d'examiner votre manuscrit.’” See Giacomo Casanova, *Mémoires de Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, écrits par lui-même*, vol. 3 (Paris: Ponthieu, 1827), 215.

21. “In his retirement, he spent the moments he was not smoking or taking care of his beloved animals reading La Calprenède, who he admired a lot, as well as Corneille and Mme de Sévigné. He spent a

we can surmise a special sympathy for animals in her depictions of characters such as the Beast and the prince-turned-pitiful-wolf in her tale, “Mirliton.”²² In sum, the relationship with Villeneuve appears to have been mutually beneficial, especially since Crébillon experienced a mid-century revival of his work at this time that brought him renewed celebrity and affluence, as well as the favor of Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour for his play *Catilina*, which signaled his triumph over Voltaire.²³ This turn of fortune allowed him to move to the Marais, an old aristocratic quarter in Paris, where Villeneuve shared his residence until her last days.

Villeneuve’s association with Crébillon also had its drawbacks. It attracted the hostility of his adversaries and would allow the public to question Villeneuve’s literary talent, as happened with many women writers in relationships with famous male authors.²⁴ As his live-in partner, she was exposed to society’s general disapproval of women writers; even more importantly, she lost the respect due to a woman of noble rank and was referred to in derogatory terms by her contemporaries in the world of letters: she was his “mistress” (*maîtresse*), “governess” (*gouvernante*), “old muse” (*vieille muse*), and “old shrew” (*vieille mégère*).²⁵ Highborn eighteenth-century women had to take great care to maintain a virtuous reputation if they wanted to be received in “le monde” or in respectable society, a society that expected women to be self-effacing, modest, and virtuous. Those who became public figures, such as published authors or actresses, became targets for public ridicule, including accusations of being “public” or disreputable women. Villeneuve was no exception, and she would become the victim of a rather complex literary hoax perpetrated to bring her public ridicule.

In 1744, four years after readers were first introduced to *La Belle et la Bête*, a work entitled *Le loup galleux et la jeune vieille, par Madame de V**** (*The Mangy Wolf and the Young Old Lady, by Madame de V****) was published anonymously.²⁶ Villeneuve found herself indirectly compared to a mean old “Scrub Brush Fairy” (*la fée des Broussailles*), transformed into a wolf with a case of mange who lived in

good portion of his days dreaming up plot twists and constructing whole novels in his head, without writing a single word” (*Dans sa retraite, il employait les intervalles qu’il dérobaît au tabac et à ces chers animaux, à lire La Calprenède, qu’il admirait beaucoup, comme Corneille et Mme de Sévigné. [Bien plus] il passait une grande partie de ses journées à rêver des intrigues et à bâtir des romans tout entiers dans sa tête, sans en écrire une seule ligne.*) See Jean-Chrétien-Ferdinand Hoefer, ed., *Nouvelle Biographie générale*, vol. 11 (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1855), 397, cited in Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 38.

22. Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 32.

23. Cooper, “Madame de Villeneuve,” 29.

24. Girou Swiderski, “La Belle ou la Bête?,” 107.

25. Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 34. Girou Swiderski points out that the term “governess” was a derogatory euphemism characterizing Villeneuve’s unconventional relationship with Crébillon: “La Belle ou la Bête?,” 106.

26. See “La querelle du *Loup galleux* [sic]” in Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 41–50.

a palace so infested with fleas “that the palace was black with them” (*que le palais en était noir*). In the *Note to the Reader*, the anonymous author claimed that she was publishing her tale for fear that someone might steal her story: “I was always convinced that someone planned to steal my poor *Wolf*, as there are a lot of people who lack imagination, and I’m taking this precaution not to include any engravings out of fear that someone might get it into his head to redo one day what I surely did pretty well.”²⁷

The anonymous *Mangy Wolf* was in fact the work of the Comte de Caylus and the actress-turned-*salonnière* Jeanne Quinault, who as we shall see took their initial hoax to the next level by enlisting others in their literary group to participate in the scheme.²⁸ In the meantime, Villeneuve was forced to respond to their initial salvo, and in 1745 she quickly published her own *Les Belles solitaires* (*The Solitary Beauties*), signed Mme de V*** (a signature she used for the first time). One of the two tales in this work, “Mirliton,” featured a prince turned into a pitiful wolf. In her own *Note to the Reader*, Villeneuve vehemently denied the authorship of *The Mangy Wolf*.²⁹ She accused “Madame de V***” not only of parodying her writing style, but of copying elements of “Mirliton,” a tale featuring a prince transformed into a scruffy wolf, which she claimed she had written twenty-five years previously.³⁰ Villeneuve defended her literary reputation for fear she would be labeled the “*Mother of wolves*” (*Mère au Loups* [sic]), most certainly a reference to the type of folk tale called an “old wolf’s tale” (*conte au vieux loup*), in addition to having created the hero of “Mirliton.”³¹

27. “J’ai toujours été convaincue que l’on avait dessein de me voler mon pauvre *Loup*, car il y a bien des gens qui n’ont pas l’esprit de l’imagination, et je prends la précaution de n’y pas mettre d’estampes, dans la crainte qu’il n’entre dans la fantaisie de quelqu’un de refaire un jour ce qu’assurément je n’ai pas mal fait.” Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 46.

28. Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus (1692–1765), antiquarian and man of letters, and Jeanne Quinault (1699–1783), actress, playwright, and *salonnière*. Caylus’s role as a patron of the arts and as an *amateur*, or arbiter of taste, was not universally appreciated; the philosopher and encyclopedist Denis Diderot, who criticized *amateurs* for their ignorance and misuse of power, vilified Caylus with this epigram, delivered after the death of the comte: “La mort nous a délivré du plus cruel des amateurs” (Death has delivered us from the most cruel of *amateurs*). See Joseph L. Waldauer, *Society and the Freedom of the Creative Man in Diderot’s Thought* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964), 78n1.

29. Charles-Joseph Mayer, comp., *Le Cabinet des fées, ou Collection choisie des contes des fées et autres contes merveilleux* (Geneva: Barde et Manget; Paris: Cuchet, 1785–89), 37:397.

30. Villeneuve describes Prince Mirliton as “a large dreadfully scrawny wolf, so emaciated that his remaining fur was completely disheveled; he was oddly muddied,” (*un grand loup, extrêmement maigre et si décharné que le poil qui lui restait était tout hérissé; il était crotté d’une étrange façon*). Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 825.

31. The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (Paris: Veuve de Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1694) defines a “tale” thus: “In common parlance, old wolf’s tale, old wives tale, Mother Goose tale, tale of the stork, stork tales, donkey skin tale, a waking dream tale, a yellow, blue, violet, one-eyed tale, the ridiculous fables such as those told by old people to entertain and amuse children” (Le vulgaire

The battle lines had thus been drawn. On the one hand, the Comte de Caylus and his group had implicitly denigrated Villeneuve's literary work by comparing her stories to old wolf's tales, and mangy ones at that, and Villeneuve the writer to an old, illiterate woman spinning her tales for children, the stereotype of the woman storyteller embraced by fairy-tale writer Charles Perrault. On the other hand, Villeneuve presented herself as a professional writer—someone in “the business of writing”—who stood by the works she offered the reading public: “if *Milton* has the misfortune of displeasing, at least I can boast of not being so cowardly as to hide behind someone else's name; when one gets into the business of writing, one must accept the risks associated with disapproval or praise.”³²

Soon after, in 1745, the Comte de Caylus and Quinault published a collection entitled *Cinq contes de fées, dont trois n'ont point encore paru, et deux sont à la troisième édition* (*Five Fairy Tales, three of which have not yet appeared and two that are in their third edition*); the *Mangy Wolf* appeared in this work again, as well as *Bellinette, or the Young Old Lady*. This new edition appears to have allowed Caylus and Quinault to extend their hoax and to publish a response to Villeneuve's defense. They put out the new collection of fairy tales by enlisting several friends from their literary coterie, the Société du Bout-du-Banc (the “end of the bench association”), which indulged in amusements, parlor games, and collective writing projects.³³ The group especially reveled in creating parodies and pastiches of fashionable works.³⁴ Françoise de Graffigny (1695–1758), who would soon become one of the best-known women writers in Europe with her *Lettres*

appelle, *Conte au vieux loup. conte de vieille. conte de ma mère l'oye. conte de la cicogne, à la cicogne. conte de peau d'asne. conte à dormir debout. conte jaune, bleu, violet. conte borgne*, Des fables ridicules telles que sont celles dont les vieilles gens entretiennent & amusent les enfants).

32. “[S]i *Mirliton* a le malheur de déplaire, du moins pourrais-je me vanter de n'avoir pas la faiblesse de me cacher sous le nom d'un autre; quand on fait tant que de se mêler d'écrire, il faut courir les risques du blâme ou de la louange.” Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 47.

33. Starting in 1741, this salon—led by Quinault, and hosted at her residence—brought together for weekly dinners writers such as Caylus, Françoise de Graffigny, Charles Pinot Duclos, François-Augustin de Paradis de Moncrif, l'abbé de Voisenon, Marivaux, Antoine de Feriol de Pont-de-Veyle, the duc de Nivernais, and Crébillon fils, and occasionally other writers. Kris Peeters identifies at least nine literary collections published by the group between 1740 and 1748, but does not include the *Cinq contes de fées*; see Peeters, “Contrefaçon contrefaite et parodie: Les Étrennes de la Saint-Jean et les recueils badins du Bout du Banc,” in *Le Comte de Caylus: Les arts et les lettres. Actes du colloque international Université d'Anvers (UFSIA) et Voltaire Foundation. Oxford, 26–27 mai, 2000*, ed. Nicholas Cronk and Kris Peeters (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 246.

34. We can see an example of this in the “Avis du véritable et premier auteur du *Loup galeux* [sic],” (“Notice from the true and first author of *The Mangy Wolf*”), in which Caylus slyly inserts a bit of publicity for the group's next publishing endeavor, *Le Recueil de ces messieurs* (*The Gentlemen's Collection*, 1745): “on a bien de la peine à avoir de l'esprit lorsqu'on travaille seul; je n'en veux pour preuve que ces messieurs, qui ont fait bien des efforts pour en avoir un peu à eux tous dans leur savant et agréable recueil” (*it's terribly difficult to be witty when one works alone; I only want the approval of those gentlemen*

d'une Péruvienne (*Letters from a Peruvian Woman*) (1747) and her play *Cénie* (1750), contributed her parodic fairy tale *La Princesse Azerolle* to the collection at Caylus's behest.³⁵ Graffigny, however, was unaware that her addition was intended to create the illusion of a bona fide edition, and that Caylus had written two fairy tales to mock Villeneuve by attributing his tales to a Mme de V***. Quinault had led Graffigny to believe that the tales were being included as a favor to Crébillon, who wanted to help Villeneuve make some money. Crébillon fils was also an active member of the Bout-du-Banc group, but it is unclear what part he had in this hoax.³⁶ In reality, Villeneuve's enemies wished to humiliate her publicly by mocking her fiction and then attributing it to her. *Cinq contes de fées* extended the hoax by pretending to be the wronged party in this affair. In the "Notice from the true and first author of *The Mangy Wolf*," the author begins:

It is quite cruel to be obliged to defend one's works, especially when one has worked hard to compose them oneself. Is it possible that a woman, famous for so many fortunate works in verse and prose, deigns to adopt my name and accuse me of plagiarism by offering *Les Belles Solitaires*? Did she believe that the public would take the title [of *The Mangy Wolf*] literally? ... As for me, I'm so annoyed by this literary nuisance that I will say goodbye to you forever, my dear reader, since this time I've gotten everything off my chest. Rest assured, I will give you nothing more, and I won't even leave behind a posthumous child.³⁷

who have worked so hard to have some [wit] themselves in their learned and delightful collection). See Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 48–49.

35. Joseph de La Porte mistakenly attributes Graffigny's *La Princesse Azerolle* to Villeneuve; see *Histoire littéraire des femmes françaises, ou lettres historiques et critiques*, vol. 4 (Paris: Lacombe, 1769), 235.

36. It would seem likely that Crébillon fils had a hand in this hoax, as he was not fond of his father's companion and someone in the group must have read Villeneuve's unpublished manuscript, presumably in the home she shared with his father. Crébillon fils, like Caylus, wrote parodies such as *L'écumoire ou Tanzai et Néadarné, histoire japonaise* (1734). Patricia Hannon and Anne E. Duggan note that seventeenth-century women's fairy tales, in whose tradition Villeneuve writes, became the prime targets of parody: "although Perrault's accessible narratives have won critical acclaim throughout the centuries, it was the aesthetic created by [Marie-Catherine] d'Aulnoy and her group that inspired parodies by eighteenth-century writers such as Claude-Prosper de Crébillon [i.e., Crébillon fils]." See Hannon and Duggan, "French Tales," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, ed. Donald Haase (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2008), 1:381.

37. "Il est bien cruel d'être obligée de défendre ses productions, surtout lorsqu'on s'est donné la peine de les faire soi-même. Se peut-il qu'une femme célèbre par tant d'ouvrages heureux en vers et en prose, daigne prendre mon nom pour m'accuser de plagiat, en donnant *Les Belles Solitaires*? ; prévoyait-elle que le public prendrait le titre [*Le Loup galeux* [sic]] au pied de la lettre? ... Pour moi, mécontente des tracasseries littéraires, je vous dis adieu pour toujours, mon cher lecteur, car à cette fois j'ai vidé le sac ;

This kind of public quarrel would have been unwelcome publicity for a respectable woman; Graffigny, herself a burgeoning writer, attests to this point. On March 2, 1745, the misinformed Parisian wrote candidly to her long-time correspondent, François Devaux, to update him on the status of the *Cinq contes de fées*:

Azerolles will be published; it remains to be seen how. The Quarrel of the Mangy Wolves is between a Mme l'Eveque and Mme de Villeneuve. Nicole [Jeanne Quinault] wanted to help out the latter for the sake of the Petit's [Crébillon fils] father. She denies the Mangy Wolf is hers. Despite this, Nicole wants to do for the former, whom she doesn't know, what she was willing to do for the latter, but I want no part of it. There are two or three people in the group who know that I have a hand in this. That doesn't go over too well in society. I'd fear more than death itself to find myself in a triad with these ladies whom I don't care for at all. I'll speak to Blaise [Caylus] in private to get Nicole to give up this foolish idea. I'd prefer not to be published, since on the whole I don't care to be, then to be lumped together in a den of iniquity with them.³⁸

Indeed, for Villeneuve this affair must have been quite disconcerting at the beginning of her career, for, as Biancardi explains, this ruse constituted a professional as well as a personal attack on the writer:

The irreverent humor of Mlle Quinault and her circle in effect allows one to perceive the satiric innuendos at play on several levels in this meticulously prepared ruse centered on the evocation of a sickly and repulsive wolf. Above all there is a parodic allusion to the imaginary beasts that Mme de Villeneuve loved to create in her tales, often so

soyez tranquille, je ne vous donnerai plus rien, et je ne laisserais pas même d'enfant posthume." See Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 48–50.

38. "Azerolle sera imprimée; reste a savoir la façon. La querelle des *Loups galleux* est entre une nommée Mde l'Eveque et Mde de Villeneuve. C'est a cette dernière que Nicole [Quinault] vouloit rendre servisse a cause du pere du Petit [Crébillon fils]. Elle nie que ce soit a elle, le *Galeux*. Malgré cela Nicole veut faire pour l'autre, qu'elle ne connoit pas, ce qu'elle vouloit faire pour celle-ci, mais je ne le voudrois pas, moi. Il y a deux ou trois personne de la société qui savent que j'y aurois ma part de decreteuse. Cela ne se passe pas ainci dans le monde. Je craindrois plus que la mort que l'on me mit en tier avec ces dames qui ne me vont point du tout. Je parlerai a Blaise [Caylus] en particulier pour rompre la fantaisie de Nicole. J'aime mieux n'etre point imprimée, car en tout je [ne] me soussie point de l'etre, que d'etre fourée dans un vilain tripot." See Françoise de Graffigny, *Correspondance: 23 octobre 1744–10 septembre 1745, Lettres 761–896*, ed. Pierre Bouillaguet, Judith Curtis, and J. Alan Dainard, vol. 6 of *Correspondance de Mme de Graffigny*, ed. J. Alan Dainard (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000), 227. Mme l'Eveque refers to Mme Louise Cavalier Lévesque (1703–1745).

hideous that they evoke fear or pity, such as the monster of *Beauty and the Beast*, and implicitly compares Mme de Villeneuve to the pitiful animals that her companion, Crébillon père, brought home in great numbers.³⁹

Despite the challenges facing women writers in eighteenth-century France in general, and Villeneuve in particular, she continued to follow in the footsteps of the celebrated seventeenth-century women who pioneered the two genres she practiced most and that were most closely associated with women writers: the novel and the fairy tale. In all, Villeneuve published a novella, *Le Phénix conjugal, nouvelle du temps* (*The Conjugal Phoenix, novella for today*, 1734); two collections of fairy tales, *La Jeune Américaine et les contes marins* (*The Young American Girl and Tales at Sea*, 1740–41) and *Les Belles solitaires* (*The Solitary Beauties*, 1745); and four novels: *Le Beau-frère supposé* (*The Presumed Brother-in-law*, 1752); *La Jardinière de Vincennes* (*The Female Gardener of Vincennes*, 1753); *Le Juge prévenu* (*The Biased Judge*, 1754); and *Mémoires de Mesdemoiselles de Marsange* (*Memoirs of the Mesdemoiselles de Marsange*, 1757). This last novel, and *Le Temps et la patience, conte moral* (*Time and Patience, a moral tale*, 1768), were published posthumously.⁴⁰ In 1755, just before her death, Villeneuve prepared for publication a work entitled *Anecdotes de la cour d'Alphonse onzième du nom, roi de Castille* (*Anecdotes from the Court of Alphonso XI, King of Castile*); this turned out to be a lightly revised edition of *Mathilde d'Aguilar*, originally published in 1667 (and reprinted as late as 1736) by Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701), one of the most popular and important fiction writers of the previous century. Published without mention of the original author or title, Villeneuve felt compelled to justify her actions in the preface to the second volume:

While I don't dare flatter myself that my style has all the glamour and frivolity of the works that are today in fashion, my pride and my bookseller have reason enough to be satisfied with the welcome the public has had the goodness to extend to my own [works]. And I believe it would be deceitful to claim this one is entirely mine; I admit then, as I despise plagiarism, that I had no part in this work, except as

39. "L'humour irrespectueux de Mlle Quinault et de son cercle permet en effet de saisir, sous cette ruse minutieusement préparée et centrée sur l'évocation d'un loup malade et rebutant, des sousentendus railleurs aux multiples effets. On peut y trouver avant tout une allusion parodique aux bêtes imaginaires que Mme de Villeneuve aimait créer dans ses contes, souvent hideuses à faire peur ou pitié, tel le monstre de *La Belle et la Bête* et, bien entendu, le loup de *Mirliton*, à moitié mort de faim et au poil hérissé." Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 44.

40. Villeneuve announced in 1741, at the end of *La Jeune Américaine*, that the next installment would contain a tale called *Le temps et la patience* (1768), which never appeared in print in Villeneuve's lifetime.

would a used clothes seller who re-pieced or removed the stains from a frock and thus contributed in his own manner.⁴¹

Indeed, in November 1755, the reviewer of *L'Année littéraire* (*The Literary Year*) remarked immediately that this was not an “original work” and that Villeneuve “only put into better French an old, forgotten novel that she shortened in certain parts and developed in others” (*elle n'a fait que mettre en meilleur Français un vieux Roman ignoré qu'elle a élagué dans des endroits, amplifié dans d'autres*).⁴² Cooper sees in Villeneuve's defense an explanation for this “borrowed” publication: Villeneuve and her bookseller wished to capitalize on Villeneuve's popularity (she signed the work *Madame de V****) in order to sell more books.

Turning to *La Belle et la Bête*, we have little documentation concerning its reception when it first appeared. We are indebted, however, to the correspondence of Graffigny and Devaux, who left us clues in their letters. The provincial Devaux, always insecure about his literary tastes, wrote to his more sophisticated Parisian friend, Graffigny: “[Elliot] lent me a dreadful fairy tale that I devoured. It's ‘Beast and Beauty’ [sic]: I found it most entertaining” (*[Elliot] m'a presté hier un mauvais conte que j'ay dévoré. C'est “Beste et Belle”: il m'a fort amusé*). On March 17, 1741, Graffigny replied with her usual chiding of Devaux: “Oh, what a heroic effort to find Beauty and the Beast charming. All of Paris is crazy about it. As for me, it entertained me thoroughly, and I don't find myself any more idiotic for it” (*Voiez le bel effort de trouver “La Belle et la Bete” joli. Tout Paris en a été fou. Pour moi il m'a fort amusé, et je ne m'en crois pas plus sotté*). Devaux then replied three days later: “I had also asked you, I believe, who wrote Beauty and the Beast. Everyone is accusing Crébillon of it, but I believe it, for while this dreadful tale entertained me a great deal because of its folly, and it takes a lot, no offense to the *beau monde* of Paris, I found it quite beautiful” (*Je vous avois demande aussi, je crois, de qui étoit La Belle et la Bete. On en accuse Crébillon, mais je le justifie car quoyque ce mauvais*

41. “Quoique je n'ose me flatter que ma façon d'écrire ait le brillant & la légèreté des Ouvrages qui sont aujourd'hui à la mode, mon amour propre et mon Libraire ont assez de sujet d'être satisfaits de l'accueil le Public a la bonté de faire au miens. Et je crois que ce seroit en abuser que de lui donner celui-ci pour être entièrement de moi, j'avoue donc en détestant le plagiat que je n'y ai de part que celle qu'un Fripier qui a retourné ou dégraissé un habit, a de part à sa façon.” *Anecdotes de la Cour d'Alphonse, onzième du nom, roi de Castille*, par Madame de V*** (Amsterdam and Paris: Hochereau, 1756) vol. 1, i. Cited in Cooper, “Madame de Villeneuve,” 69.

42. Élie Fréron, *L'Année littéraire*, vol. 7 (Paris: Michel Lambert, 1755), letter 9, 204, cited in Cooper, “Madame de Villeneuve,” 68. *The Literary Year* (*L'Année littéraire*) was founded in 1754 by Élie Fréron (1718–1776). Paul van Tieghem (1871–1948) wrote a scholarly monograph on this journal entitled *L'Année littéraire (1754–1790) comme intermédiaire en France des littératures étrangères* (Paris: F. Rieder, 1917).

conte m'ait amusé par sa folie, il s'en faut beaucoup, n'en déplaise a tout Paris, que je l'ay trouvé beau).⁴³

This exchange demonstrates that Villeneuve's fairy tale was received positively in her day, but that she did not reap the accolades due to her because she published it anonymously. The most significant reason she did not receive credit for *La Belle et la Bête*, of course, is that Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780) published a shortened version of Villeneuve's tale in 1756, after Villeneuve's death, without attributing authorship to her.⁴⁴ Leprince de Beaumont's *Magasin des enfants* went through twenty-six editions before 1789, and thus her version of the fairy tale reached a much greater readership than did Villeneuve's.⁴⁵ In his five-volume anthology *Histoire littéraire des femmes françaises* (*Literary History of French Women*, 1769), Joseph de La Porte condemns Leprince de Beaumont for this, and other lapses of this sort:

Madame Leprince de Beaumont can rightfully be accused of the error of having taken her stories and tales from different authors without naming them and presenting them as if they were her own, due to some slight changes she made in the style. Such is the case, for example, of *Beauty and the Beast*, a tale by Madame de Villeneuve. ...

43. Françoise de Graffigny, *Correspondance: 1 octobre 1740–27 novembre 1742, Lettres 309–490*, ed. N.R. Johnson, vol. 3 of *Correspondance de Mme de Graffigny*, ed. J. Alan Dainard (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1992), 124–27. Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont condensed *La Belle et la Bête*, reducing the length of the tale by three-quarters; moreover, she simplified it for her young female readership, while redacting everything she deemed inappropriate for her charges. For example, Beauty's nocturnal romance with the Unknown, and her daily entertainments at the Beast's castle, did not appear. More significantly, the background stories of the Beast and of the Fairy Lady were eliminated, thus portraying Beauty as a virtuous commoner, not the daughter of illustrious parents from a fairy bloodline. For more analyses of these differences see Raymonde Robert, *Le conte de fées littéraire en France de la fin du XVIIe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1982), 147–53; Claire Debru, "Le Magasin des enfants (1756) ou le conte de fées selon une gouvernante: Pratiques de la réécriture chez Madame Le Prince de Beaumont," in *Le conte merveilleux au XVIIIe siècle: Une poétique expérimentale*, ed. Régine Jomand-Baudry and Jean-François Perrin (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2002), 151–63; and Tatiana Korneeva, "Desire and Desirability in Villeneuve and Leprince de Beaumont's 'Beauty and the Beast,'" *Marvels & Tales* 28, no. 2 (2014): 233–51.

44. Ironically, Villeneuve had already done to Madeleine de Scudéry's novel *Mathilde d'Aguilar* what Leprince de Beaumont would do to *La Belle et la Bête* just one year after Villeneuve's death (see in this Introduction pages 24–25). This and other practices, such as pirated publications, were not uncommon, since modern notions of literary property and copyright were not established in France until the end of the century. Before the French Revolution in 1789, royal permits or privileges to publish were given to printers, not authors. The literary property law referred to as the "Declaration of the Rights of Genius" was established in 1793. See Carla Hesse, *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1810* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

45. See Cooper, "Madame de Villeneuve," 64.

Madame de Beaumont only abridged it and changed some expressions; but the content is the same.⁴⁶

Given Graffigny's characterization of the positive reception by the Parisian reading public, it is surprising that so few editions were issued during Villeneuve's lifetime. Her second collection of fairy tales, unfortunately, suffered the same fate. Published in haste in 1745 due to the "*Mangy Wolf*" scandal mentioned above, *Les Belles solitaires* was never reprinted, with the exception of one tale, "L'Histoire du roi Santon" ("The Story of King Santon"), which appeared in the *Bibliothèque universelle des romans* in 1777.⁴⁷

Unfortunately for Villeneuve, her fairy tales did not receive critical attention until after her death, and then only in a cursory manner in anthologies or biographical dictionaries of women writers. Critics expressed varying opinions about the literary value of her fiction in general, and the critics appear to be far harsher than her readership. In his *Histoire littéraire des femmes françaises*, notable as an early work acknowledging the considerable contributions of women writers in France, La Porte lauded her fairy tales but criticized her novels: "[Madame de Villeneuve] had a great facility to write mediocre things; and among the novels published under her name, we cannot cite a single one that deserves some distinction, except some fairy tales written with a good measure of wit, grace, and finesse."⁴⁸ In contrast, Charles-Joseph de Mayer's *Cabinet des fées* (*The Fairies' Cabinet*, 1786) found Villeneuve's fiction praiseworthy: "She wrote novels, and had in this respect some success." He singled out *La Jardinière de Vincennes* in particular, which "offers a tableau of the caprices of love and fortune; the situations are moving, the nobility of the sentiments and the perspicacity of her observations make up for the weakness and errors of her style."⁴⁹ Jean François de Lacroix, unlike his predecessors, strikes an unequivocal laudatory note in his

46. "Un défaut qu'on peut rapprocher à juste titre à Madame Le Prince de Beaumont, c'est d'avoir pris ses histoires et ses contes dans divers Auteurs qu'elle ne nomme pas, et de les donner comme venant d'elle, à la faveur de quelques changements qu'elle fait dans le stile. Tel est, par exemple, La Belle et la Bête, Conte de Madame de Villeneuve. ... Madame de Beaumont n'a fait que l'abrégé, et changer les expressions ; le fond est le même." See La Porte, *Histoire littéraire des femmes françaises*, 4:375.

47. Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 51.

48. "[Madame de Villeneuve] avait une très-grande facilité à faire des choses médiocres; & parmi tous les Romans publiés sous son nom, on n'en cite aucun qui mérite une certaine distinction, excepté quelques Contes de Fées, écrits avec assez d'esprit, de légèreté, & de finesse." See La Porte, *Histoire littéraire*, 263; see also Suzan van Dijk, "L'Abbé de La Porte et la canonisation des romancières du XVIIIe siècle: Le cas de Françoise de Graffigny," *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 21 (1997): 43–54.

49. "Elle s'exerça dans le genre romanesque, & elle eut à cette égard quelques succès. Ce dernier, *La Jardinière de Vincennes*, est un tableau des caprices tableau des caprices de l'amour & de la fortune; les situations sont attendrissantes, la noblesse des sentiments, la justesse des réflexions rachètent la faiblesse & l'incorrection du style." See Mayer, comp., *Le Cabinet des fées*, 37:386–87.

Dictionnaire portatif des femmes célèbres (*Portable Dictionary of Famous Women*, 1788): “Villeneuve distinguished herself in the career of literature, through her great talent for works of fiction. She composed several in which one finds the motifs of fables; they contain the most interesting moral lessons. Her main work is *La Jardinière de Vincennes*, 1750, which is still being sold today.”⁵⁰ Uniquely, Lacroix includes Villeneuve’s relationship to Crébillon as a tribute, rather than a detriment, to her reputation: “In commerce with many learned people, M. de Crébillon père was, above all, exceptionally attached to her for as long as he lived” (*En commerce avec beaucoup de savants, M. de Crébillon père lui fut surtout singulièrement attaché tant qu’il vécut*).⁵¹ Lastly, Marguerite Briquet’s 1804 anthology of women writers simply reiterated the sentiments of Sabathier de Castres, in his *Trois siècles de la littérature française* (*Three Centuries of French Literature*, 1788), as well as La Porte:

Her novels have had some success; they offer in general, according to Sabathier, moving situations; lively and generous sentiments; moral, noble and sensible reflections; but the plots have nothing new, the events don’t always follow verisimilitude, and the circumstances are often forced; the style, moreover, is uneven, wordy, incorrect, and full of minute details. *The Female Gardener of Vincennes* is Madame de Villeneuve’s masterpiece. Her fairy tales are written with a good measure of grace and finesse.⁵²

50. “Villeneuve s’est fait connaître dans la carrière des belles-lettres, par un heureux talent pour les ouvrages de fiction. Elle en a composé plusieurs où sont les emblèmes de la fable, on trouve les plus intéressantes leçons de morale. Son principal ouvrage est *La Jardinière de Vincennes*, 1750, qui se vend encore.” See Jean François de Lacroix, *Dictionnaire portatif des femmes célèbres, contenant l’histoire des femmes savantes, des actrices, & généralement des dames qui se sont rendues fameuses dans tous les siècles par leurs aventures, les talents, l’esprit & le courage*, vol. 2 (Paris: Belin et Volland, 1788), 723.

51. Lacroix, 724. Villeneuve was not included in the original 1769 edition of this work.

52. “Ces romans ont eu du succès; ils offrent en général, dit Sabathier, des situations pathétiques, des sentiments vifs et généreux, des réflexions morales, nobles et sensées; mais les plans n’ont rien de neuf; les évènements n’y sont pas toujours d’accord avec la vraisemblance, les situations sont souvent forcées; le style, d’ailleurs, est inégal, diffus, incorrect, et chargé de détails minutieux. *La Jardinière de Vincennes* est le chef d’œuvre de Madame de Villeneuve.” See original 1769 edition of this work.

“Ces romans ont eu du succès; ils offrent en général, dit Sabathier, des situations pathétiques, des sentiments vifs et généreux, des réflexions morales, nobles et sensées; mais les plans n’ont rien de neuf; les évènements n’y sont pas toujours d’accord avec la vraisemblance, les situations sont souvent forcées; le style, d’ailleurs, est inégal, diffus, incorrect, et chargé de détails minutieux. *La Jardinière de Vincennes* est le chef d’œuvre de Madame de Villeneuve.” Marguerite-Ursule-Fortunée Briquet, *Dictionnaire historique, littéraire et bibliographique des Françaises, et des Etrangères naturalisées en France* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1804), 338. Since the practice of literary criticism was in its infancy during this period, it was not uncommon for critics to copy each other’s opinion, even verbatim, without citation. Thus, we find repetition in the reviews of Villeneuve’s works.

During her lifetime, Villeneuve found more celebrity as a novelist than as an author of fairy tales. Seven years elapsed between the publication of her two fairy-tale collections in the early to mid-1740s and the publication of her first novel in 1752, after which she published three more novels in quick succession. Her novels were rarely reprinted, however, except *La Jardinière de Vincennes*, which was without a doubt her greatest success.⁵³ The *Bibliographie du genre romanesque français 1751–1800* lists fifteen editions of Villeneuve's novel, putting her on par, at least in number of editions, with the very popular translated novels of British authors Samuel Richardson (*Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* [1748], and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* [1753]) and John Cleland (*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* [1748–49]), and those of her French compatriots, Crébillon fils (*Le Nuit et le moment* [*The Night and the Moment*, 1755]), Leprince de Beaumont (*Lettres de Madame du Montier* [*Letters of Madame du Montier*, 1756]), and Claude-Henri de Fusée de Voisenon (*Histoire de la Felicité* [*Happiness: A History*, 1751]).⁵⁴ While Cooper attributes Villeneuve's shift in genre to the declining fashion of fairy tales after the 1740s, other factors may well have been at play. It may be no coincidence that Villeneuve stopped publishing fairy tales, and publishing *tout court* for a time, after the humiliating public attack by the Bout-du-Banc salon. When she did resume with *Les Belles solitaires*, Villeneuve made a point of once again denying her authorship of *Le Loup galleux* while assuming full responsibility for her own works, as she later reiterated in the prefatory notice to *La Jardinière de Vincennes*:

When I published my *Solitary Beauties*, I declared in the preface that I had no more part in the *Mangy Wolf* than I did in *Bellinette* [*or the Old Young Lady*], which was gratuitously attributed to me. And I didn't hide the motive that obliged me to refuse its patronage. I will not explain myself on this new occasion, and I leave it to you to decide by declaring the reason that obliges me to say that I had no part in it (though the first initial of my name can also be

53. According to Silas Paul Jones, *A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700 to 1750* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1939), and Angus Martin, Vivienne Mylne, and Richard Frautschi, *Bibliographie du genre romanesque français, 1751–1800* (Paris: France-Expansion, 1977), the dates of editions and reprints for each of Villeneuve's works are as follows: *Le Phénix conjugal* (1733, 1734, 1735); *La Jeune Américaine et les contes marins* (1740–1741, 1744, 1765); *Les Belles solitaires* (1745); *Le Beau-frère supposé* (1752); *La Jardinière de Vincennes* (1753, 1757, 1757, 1759, 1761, 1763, 1767, 1771, 1771, 1778, 1780, 1783, 1784, 1788, 1811); *Le juge prévenu* (1754, 1764, 1766); *Anecdotes de la cour d'Alphonse onzième du nom, roi de Castille* (1756); *Mémoires de Mesdemoiselles de Marsange* (1757, 1757, 1800, 1804); and *Le Temps et la Patience, conte moral* (1768).

54. Judging the popularity of a work by the number of editions published gives us only a vague approximation. For the most part, we do not know how many copies were issued per edition, and some industrious printers would use leftover copies from one edition to reissue them under a new title page.

found on the book entitled *Mémoires de Madame de Saldaigne* written by Madame de V.): it is out of vanity, or also, perhaps, out of modesty, so that I don't crown myself with laurels I don't deserve. I'm all too happy if my true works entertain enough to create the desire for more. But in case I don't succeed, I possess enough of my own imperfections to humble my pride, without taking on those of others, or without adding to it the stupid arrogance of a jay adorned in peacock feathers, which, in my opinion, is worse than being a bad author.⁵⁵

Whatever the reason for her publishing hiatus, it appears that Villeneuve continued to write during the seven-year gap, since she had several novels ready to go to press once she began to publish again.⁵⁶ In the *Note to the Reader* in *Anecdotes* (1755), Villeneuve announced confidently that since [her previous works] “had the good fortune to be received well enough to encourage me not to stop after my last publication ... I count on publishing several more that are all ready to go.”⁵⁷

Cooper emphasizes, rightly, that Villeneuve published with the goal of financial reward, and that she paid careful attention to what the reading public desired. Critics of her time, such as La Porte, observed that “[s]he sought to

55. “Lorsque je fis imprimer mes belles solitaires je déclarai dans la préface que je n'avais aucune part au loup galeux [sic], non plus qu'à Bellinette dont on me chargeait gratuitement, & je ne cachai pas le motif qui m'obligeait d'en refuser le patronage. Je ne m'explique point en cette nouvelle occasion, & je laisse à deviner, en déclarant (qu'encore que la lettre initiale de mon nom se trouve au livre intitulé *Mémoires de Madame de Saldaigne* rédigés par Madame de V.) quelle est la raison qui m'oblige à dire que je n'y ai nulle part, c'est peut-être par vanité, peut-être est-ce aussi par modestie, pour ne me point couronner des lauriers que je n'ai pas mérités ; trop heureuse si ce qui est véritablement mon ouvrage plaît assez pour en faire désirer d'autre ; mais en cas que je ne réussisse point j'aurai assez de mes propres défauts pour humilier mon amour propre, sans me charger de ceux des autres, ou sans y ajouter le sot orgueil du geai paré des plumes du Paon, ce qui à mon gré est encore pis que d'être mauvais Auteur.” See Villeneuve, *La Jardinière de Vincennes* (London and Paris: Hochereau, 1753), v–vi. *The Mémoires de Madame de Saldaigne* were written by Adrien de La Vieuville d'Orville, comte de Vignacourt (“M. D. V.***”), and published in 1745.

56. One might also consider the fact that the “proscription of novels” dictated by the Chancellor of France, Henri François d'Aguesseau, was in full force from 1738 to 1750. Given that Villeneuve was the companion of the literary censor, she may not have dared to publish her novels until the proscription was lifted, even though scores of novelists were publishing their novels anonymously in defiance of the law during this period. See Georges May, *Le dilemme du roman au XVIIIe siècle: Étude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique, 1715–1761* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

57. Ils “ont eu le bonheur de plaire assez de m'encourager à n'en pas rester au dernier que j'ai donné, & je compte en mettre encore sous presse plusieurs autres qui sont tous prêts,” *Anecdotes de la cour d'Alphonse onzième du nom* (Amsterdam and Paris: Hochereau, 1756), vol. 1, iv. See Cooper, “Madame de Villeneuve,” 41.

gain by her pen the security that destiny had refused her.”⁵⁸ While this practice might be common today, Villeneuve wrote during a period when writing for the literary marketplace, as opposed to the more traditional rewards of aristocratic patronage, was less common. Most eighteenth-century women writers composed for small private audiences, and published only unintentionally, reluctantly, or anonymously, since, as we have seen, French society generally disapproved of this activity for women.

A progression in Villeneuve’s personal comfort with this kind of publicity may be detected in how she signed her works. Her first creation (*Le Phénix conjugal*) appeared anonymously; her second (*La Jeune Américaine*) was signed Madame de ***; her third (*Les Belles solitaires*) was attributed to Madame de V*** (or some variation of it, such as Madame D.V.), as were those that followed. Despite this quasi-anonymity, the general reading public came to recognize the woman behind these initials, since the flurry of publications by booksellers immediately following Villeneuve’s death highlight the author’s name in their titles, confirming that Villeneuve had built a market for her works and had ultimately succeeded as an author of prose fiction.⁵⁹

We get a strong sense of Villeneuve’s pride and confidence in her works, despite the conventional gestures of humility in her prefaces and dedications. Early on, she writes in *La Jeune Américaine*: “But how does one repress the desire to see oneself in print? So let those who will read it do so; it is more the reader’s business than my own. Thus, far from making my humble excuses to the reader, I threaten to publish six tales at least as long as this one, whose reception, whether good or bad, is the only thing that can compel me to make them public or abandon them to my study.”⁶⁰ More than a decade later, Villeneuve dedicated *La Jardinière de Vincennes*, “this short novel of my composition” (*ce petit Roman de ma composition*), to the Marquise de Senneterre, and added: “I am emboldened to take this liberty based on the good fortune my previous works have had” (*Je suis enhardie à prendre cette liberté sur le bonheur qu’on a eu mes ouvrages précédents*).⁶¹ As

58. “Elle a cherché à se procurer, par sa plume, les secours que lui refusait la fortune.” La Porte, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 4, 188.

59. For example: two new editions of *La Jardinière de Vincennes* appeared in 1757; two editions of the *Mémoires des Mademoiselles de Marsanges*, par l’auteur de *La Jardinière de Vincennes* appeared the same year; a new edition of *La Jeune Américaine*, renamed *Contes de Madame de Villeneuve*, came out in 1765; then *Le Juge prévenu*, par Mde. de Villeneuve, in 1766; and finally *Le Temps et la patience, conte moral par feu Madame de Villeneuve*, in 1768.

60. “Mais le moyen de supprimer l’envie de se faire imprimer, et d’ailleurs lira qui voudra: c’est encore plus l’affaire du lecteur que la mienne. Ainsi, loin de lui faire de très humbles excuses, je le menace de six contes pour le moins aussi étendus que celui-ci, dont le succès, bon ou mauvais, est seul capable de m’engager à les rendre publics, où les laisser dans le Cabinet.” See Biancardi, ed., *La Jeune Américaine*, 75.

61. Villeneuve, *La Jardinière de Vincennes*, ii.

Cooper points out, moreover, all her dedications were to women, and the fact that Villeneuve “sought the good will of women and wives connected with the literary trade bespeaks her awareness of the political potential of these dedications.”⁶²

Despite Villeneuve’s popularity during her day, a negative portrait of both her and her oeuvre was passed down to following generations. Her most popular works disappeared from the marketplace after the early nineteenth century and she became marginalized as a writer, a common fate of even the most celebrated women writers of the old regime.⁶³ Fortunately, critics such as Cooper, Girou Swiderski, and Biancardi have brought fresh critical attention to Villeneuve’s life and career, have rectified errors retained by literary history, and have questioned or challenged the unfavorable portrayals that had been repeated ad infinitum.

The Literary Fairy Tale and Women Writers

In the late seventeenth century, the genre of the literary fairy tale originated in the culture of French Parisian salons—pleasurable gatherings of elite society headed by a woman of high standing, someone we now call a *salonnière*. To pass the time, these groups of literate men and women would entertain each other by recounting marvelous tales, which often included fairies who decided the fate of the mortals they protected or punished. Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy (1651–1705) was the first to launch the vogue of the literary fairy tale when she published “L’Île de la félicité” (“The Island of Happiness”), embedded in her novel *Histoire d’Hypolite, Comte de Douglas* (*The Story of Hypolitus, Earl of Douglas*) in 1690. D’Aulnoy and her circle of friends and colleagues—Catherine Bernard, Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force, Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier de Villandon, Henriette-Julie Castelnau de Murat, and Catherine Durand—began publishing collections of literary fairy tales for adult audiences.⁶⁴ Indeed, d’Aulnoy coined the term “fairy tale” when she entitled her 1698 four-volume collection *Les Contes des fées*. Seifert writes of this mode: “Not only were two-thirds of the contes de fées published by women, but the vogue itself, from all appearances, was inaugurated by the *conteuses* (female fairy-tale writers), who were then followed by several *conteurs* (male fairy-tale

62. Cooper, “Madame de Villeneuve,” 34.

63. Joan DeJean argues that from the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries, women’s literature was circulated widely in anthologies intended to inform adult readers of trends in literature. In the nineteenth century, however, male critics and pedagogues asserted control over the literary canon, selecting works suitable to be taught to young men in the *collèges* in order to create “good Christians” “useful to civil society,” according to the abbé Claude-Pierre Goujet. Women’s literary contributions were thus systematically eliminated from the canon of French literature. See Joan DeJean, “Classical Reeducation: Decanonizing the Feminine,” *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000), 61.

64. For the works of these important women writers in English translation, see *Enchanted Eloquence: Fairy Tales by Seventeenth-Century French Women Writers*, ed. Lewis C. Seifert and Domna C. Stanton (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010).