Le Singe est-il toujours singe?
Speculating on Ugliness, Refinement, and Beauty in Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's "Babiole"

by

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Mirrors deceive and mirrors reveal. Mirrors are ephemeral, just like beauty. Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1650/51–1705) was not spinning tales as wet nurses and nannies did in the bedroom of Louis XIV or other aristocratic children; neither were peasant children gathered closely around her in front of the hearth to listen to her *contes*. D'Aulnoy created fairy tales for adults, specifically told and read in salons of aristocratic women—and these fairy tales were their looking glasses. In her story, "Babiole," d'Aulnoy constructs a tale in which a cursed queen gives birth to a human infant that metamorphoses into a monkey shortly thereafter. Despite the fact that Babiole describes herself in repugnant terms, d'Aulnoy's treatment of Babiole's humanness is captivating: she is depicted as a reasoning being, capable of owning pets, falling in love, and refusing to look at herself in the mirror. The tale concludes with a magical transformation in the desert from monkey to beautiful woman—after which she marries her cousin, the prince, who once rejected her apish love, but eagerly accepts her now human hand. Babiole reunites with her birth mother, and they live happily ever after, free from bestial tones of the simian.

As Elizabeth Wanning Harries demonstrates in *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale,* the *conteuses* were working within a self-referential frame; their fairy tales were mirrors for their lives and the *Ancien Régime*'s aristocratic cultural milieu. Aspects of seeing, seeing oneself, and being seen are salient when considering this simian fairy tale. I argue that "Babiole" reflects anxiety of the era surrounding animal-human differences, as well as unmasks a tension between ugliness and refinement that operates along the frontier of beast and woman. This tension allows us to reflect on a deviant category of otherness, which refutes *Ancien Régime* ideals of beauty and plays a central role in viewing, and imagining, the non-white body. Imitation, linked with ugliness, refinement, and beauty, becomes a site of stigma: the animal apes the human, and the human apes period ideals of female beauty. Ultimately, Babiole herself becomes a mirror. Babiole shifts from animal-object—as an item to be displayed and collected—to human-subject, as the most beautiful princess in the universe, in the d'Aulnoyian *conte de fées*,

explicating and speculating on ideas surrounding animality and the *salonnière*. For in the end, ugliness is discordant with refinement, even if refinement is spectacular and wondrous, as is Babiole's prodigy.

As Lewis Seifert has shown in his work on hybridization and seventeenth-century French fairy tales, hybridization in d'Aulnoy's work manifests itself as highlighting the "tensions between human and nonhuman animality"; for Seifert, "Babiole" shows how d'Aulnoy plays with contemporary discourses of the day regarding the animal and the human boundary—d'Aulnoy confounds the certainty of boundaries and "unsettles" them (246). Although the monkey was an exotic pet imported to Western Europe that enjoyed considerable popularity among the rich from the eleventh to twelfth century onward (Salisbury 53), the monkeys' origins—namely, in colonized spaces of the era—speaks to this idea of othered, non-white bodies. The post-colonial perspective will be important for my reading of this tale, and a surprising juxtaposition of two mirror scenes later in the article will take this into consideration.

The opposition between the colonized/colonizer and the beast/human are linked in this tale: the two pairs mirror each other. Additionally, along the border of the beast and the human, we must tend to the notion of the human giving birth to an animal or a hybrid; this emphasis on childbirth suggests significant biographical intertexts in d'Aulnoy's work. D'Aulnoy herself had six children, of which four survived to adulthood (Defrance 15).[1] Her fertility and her experience as a mother adds much richness to the text itself, as we shall see. The language d'Aulnoy uses surrounding conception, birth and mothering is poignant, and is just another manifestation of the *salonnière*'s self-reflexivity.

Self-reflexivity again plays a major role in collecting and cabinets of curiosity during this time period: one collects and consumes to reflect a mastery of refinement. The connection between the heroine, Babiole, and cabinets of curiosity is a crucial aspect of refinement in d'Aulnoy's tale. As her name indicates, a "babiole" could be put on display, as a knick-knack or trinket, and then put away. Kathryn Hoffmann writes about hypertrichotic girls—hairy girls—who played the harpsichord as Babiole, spoke several languages, and were kept at court as pets. These girls, cov-

[1] For more information on childbirth and the fairy tale during this era, see Tucker, *Pregnant Fictions*; "Like Mother, Like Daughter"; and "Fairies, Midwives, and Birth Spaces." Tucker writes on the notion of birth in the seventeenth century and how these fairy tales, and fairies in particular, serve as commentary on midwifery in the late seventeenth century, which was decried as male doctors began to dominate the medical field.

ered in hair much like an ape or monkey, worked and travelled often with fairs of the period; thus hypertrichotic girls became commodified and collected—they became things or objects, and were no longer human beings (Hoffmann 67–85).[2]

The possibility of owning and displaying the rare and exotic was an important moment in d'Aulnoy's life, as well as in her family's. In fact, d'Aulnoy herself was clearly familiar with monkeys; in her *Mémoires de la cour d'Espagne* and *Relation du voyage d'Espagne* from 1690 and 1691 respectively, she mentions monkeys several times; a monkey was even offered to her daughter as a gift (Hoffmann 75). Moreover, a monkey appears on the frontispiece in d'Aulnoy's third volume of tales, *Les Contes des fées* (1711), recalling the fairy tale "Babiole" and its heroine (Harries, *Twice Upon a Time* 52). In this frontispiece, we see an older woman, dressed as a sibyl, with glasses, holding a book. Two standing children—a girl and a boy—accompany her. On the floor in front of her is a cherubic child playing with a monkey on a leash. Christine Jones, Gabrielle Verdier, and Elizabeth Wanning Harries have discussed this frontispiece at length. Verdier reads the simian as a manifestation of exoticism, and emphasizes how the small child in the foreground touches his index finger to the monkey's in the same way that Michelangelo's Adam does with God (486). Verdier interprets this sacred gesture as imputing a sense of dignity to the frontispiece that would otherwise make the child seem merely distracted.

Jones, on the other hand, highlights how the monkey is tied to the theme of imitation: the monkey's very body language and the extended index finger mirrors the gesture of the child (65). Jones writes, "The intimate relationship of the child and the monkey, which recalls the image of God and man, itself refers to an act of creation" (*ibid*.). Jones also reads this sign of imitation as signaling that the literary *conteuses* of the era used parody: "The theme of imitation as it appears here suggests that parody and creativity will be the stylistic tools of the literary *conteuse*," she writes (*ibid*.). While I agree that imitation is clearly at stake, what interests me here is the mirror-like image the monkey and child represent; and like Jones, I am fascinated by the allusion to man and God. The monkey is clearly seen as inferior and degenerate to the human, while man is seen as the inferior image of God; this hierarchical chain, with man being the monkey of God, is, in itself, a clever parody. Also we must not forget that

[2] For more on collecting and wonders, see Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750*.

monkeys were clearly connected to Satan, as he was also the ape of God (Janson 17–19). The monkey is a complicated sign here indeed, and although we can read this through many lenses, the darker connotations of mirroring the human and of refracting man's darkest primal desires and urges rest beneath imitative gestures or exotic symbols previously discussed. Furthermore, to add to this darker connotation, these exotic simians hailed from colonized or non-Western regions, and were conflated with the colonized's body. In brief, this taming, ownership, and domination of the simian hearken back to ideas of subjugating the other, non-white body. When reading the frontispiece, an irreconcilable difference echoes between the animal, or othered body, and the *salonnières.*

When considering the differences between the animal and the human, let us examine the beginning of the tale, "Babiole," and how the eponymous character's transformation, and the language that surrounds this transformation, unfolds. D'Aulnoy writes:

> Enfin la reine donna le jour à la plus belle créature que l'on ait jamais vue: on lui attacha en diligence la fleur d'aube-épine sur la tête ; & dans le même instant, ô merveille ! elle devint une petite guenon, sautant, courant & cambriolant dans la chambre, sans que rien y manquât. A cette métamorphose, toutes les dames poussèrent des cris effroyables, & la reine, plus allarmée qu'aucune, pensa mourir de désespoir. (53)

Already, we see an emphasis on vision and beauty: she is born the most beautiful *créature* that the queen and her court have ever seen. The choice of the word *créature* markedly foreshadows the infant's transformation to the bestial. D'Aulnoy alludes to the human-to-beast metamorphosis to come. And indeed, this superlative beauty of the human infant is rapidly followed by a dramatic change that is quite disturbing. Although the change is marvelous (*ô merveille!*), the tenor of the language that follows shows a chaotic and disorderly beast that is intruding on the atmosphere of refined decorum; the monkey is depicted as jumping, hopping, and breaking into this carefully controlled space of etiquette among highly cultivated, courtly women.

First, this concerning and horrifying conduct by the metamorphosed *guenon* incites gasps and cries of horror from the female courtesans. The queen is the most horrified of all. The courtesans' and the queen's extreme reactions reveal a remarkably emotional dimension: this highly vulnerable and emotional outpouring is not refined at all. Here the aristocratic women

lose their polished exteriors and become unrefined, primal, and emotive. This transformation from child to grotesque beast mortifies the queen; clearly, the queen is repulsed by the rapid metamorphosis of her newborn daughter into an animal, revealing the primal fear of one's offspring being born with a defect—an animal body. However, in this case, the queen had a taste of initial, human beauty and then was immediately robbed of her pride and happiness. The worst thing imaginable happened—a beastly transformation—perhaps even more appalling than the death of a child. The tale continues: "elle étoit déjà guenon, guenon confirmée, ne voulant ni tetter, ni faire l'enfant, il ne lui falloit que des noix & des marrons" (53).

In what follows, we shall see how several important terms and ideas are at work in the preceding passage. Was she always already a monkey, even her spirit, as this passage seems to imply? First, Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* (1690) defines *guenon* as: "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."

Guenon is entangled in the world of the ugly, and/or aging, female body. The term was used to lambaste and castigate the feminine, but also implies a narrative of ownership and possession connected to *plaisir*. This aforementioned scene of the infant girl turned simian and her monstrous transformation contains marked feminine energy; all of it is clearly unrefined, raw, exposed, and unbridled, including the emotions of the courtesans as well as those of the monkey girl herself. This ugliness is clearly transmitted from her grandmother to her mother to Babiole herself, by the fairy Fanferluche's curse: her bestial transformation is a hereditary curse, as we learn at the beginning of the *conte* that the malevolent fairy was present when her grandmother was giving birth to her mother, wishing her nothing but heartache *(chagrins)* from the beginning (51). The atmosphere of female domestic and aristocratic space is permeated with ugliness and misfortune. The courtesans display unsophisticated and emotional openness and vulnerability surrounding this event. The whole emotional atmosphere of the birth is destabilized. Furthermore, not only is the monkey girl leaping frenetically around in crazy and unstable movements, she rejects anything that connects to the human.

Second, this rejection of the human cripples Babiole's relationship with her mother: the pair's relationship is fractured. Here we will examine sight, mirroring, and breastfeeding. It is interesting to consider that vision is an integral part of the mother-infant relationship, or at least the wet nurse-infant relationship. It was very common to hire a wet nurse during

this era, as breastfeeding was considered to affect a woman's beauty and ruin her figure—once again, vanity comes front and center.[3] Despite the fact that the queen in this *conte* probably would not have breastfed her child, it is important to consider that the moment after birth is one of the most memorable in any mother's life. Although a newborn has limited ocular capacities in the first weeks, the infant soon begins to mirror its mother's and primary caretaker's faces from five weeks old onward.[4] In many cases, the wet nurse remained with the elite family; in others, the child was given to a nearby wet nurse from among rural folk connected to the elite family by farming their land.[5] Thus it is possible that the queen would have had access to her child on a regular basis; an early modern reader would realize this possibility.

Mirroring becomes paramount in this tale, and we see ugliness and monstrosity converge at this point. This mirroring of the maternal face is remarkable and a hallmark of the mother-infant pair, and the queen is cheated of this special relationship. Equally, it could be said, that the human infant turned monkey is deprived of the benefits of mirroring: the emotional and social aspects of mirroring and the ability to empathetically connect with the mother figure is denied to both the monkey girl and her mother. The mirroring relationship is foiled by the beastly transformation. Furthermore, after nine months, she witnesses her daughter transform into a monkey, or an animal that is depicted as rejecting breastfeeding and cuddling; the first time a mother sees her child's face and those initial tender moments shared between the pair are minutes about which many mothers dream, and the queen is denied this privilege. In place of this beautiful moment, the queen is presented with ugliness and the escapades of a monkey that merely wants nuts ("il ne lui falloit que des noix & des

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[3] Wet nursing, an ancient custom, became even more popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. Some scholars estimate that in the eighteenth century, over half the children born to "middling and elite families in Paris" were breastfed by someone other than their biological mother for the first year or two of their lives. See Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime*, 133 and 135.

[4] See Legerstee and Varghese, "The Role of Maternal Affect Mirroring on Social Expectancies in Three-Month-Old Infants," 1301–1313. The authors' study, conducted on two- and three-month-old infants, maintains that "optimal social interactions are characterized by sequentially dependent responding (turn taking) between infant and caregiver during which the dyad can achieve a social interactive state in which the infant's optimal level of emotional affect and attention is maintained" (1301). This type of interaction between the mother and child is considered to be "mirroring" or "empathetic responsiveness" displayed by the caregivers.

[5] Tuttle, Conceiving the Old Regime, 133.

marrons" 53), which incites the following anxiety: "Que vais-je devenir ! quelle honte pour moi, tous mes sujets croiront que j'ai fait un monstre" (53). This self-reflexive despair does not involve her child: it does not read, "What will become of my child?" Rather, it poses the question of what will happen to the queen herself. How will this shameful and ugly event play out for the queen herself in relation to her subjects? She states that all of her subjects will believe and think that she has birthed a monster. The queen's very refinement, and by extension her beauty, is at stake.

Third, in this human-to-animal transformation of this dramatic scene, we witness one of the worst nightmares of a woman of this period: giving birth to an animal was a horrific event and would carry much shame. The child-beast who carries the curse of his or her mother—whether the mother thought about monkeys too much (implying a narrative of mental illness, obsession, or impure thoughts), or whether a fairy cursed her—was indeed a monstrous sign. The queen's grief and the guilt concerning her contaminated daughter lead her towards infanticide. The queen's ladies suggest that the she should tell the king that "la princesse est morte, & renfermer cette guenuche dans une boîte que l'on jetera au fond de la mer" (53). This is a very unsuccessful endeavor, as Babiole is saved by the queen's sister and her four-year-old son; the pair intercept the servant that the queen sent to kill the monkey baby. The little prince wants to keep the monkey as a pet. Thus the monkey comes to be known as Babiole (55); again, we are reminded that this name indicates possession, or "une chose de peu de valeur" according to Furetière. Ultimately, Babiole becomes a collector's object.

The physical description of the monkey in the story changes course here; if her birth and her rapid transformation into a monkey are grotesque and troubling, calling the queen's identity into question, she transforms once again when she belongs to her aunt and her young cousin, the prince. She becomes a royal toy, a strange object of interrogation, and even an uncanny spectacle. The little prince demands that:

> elle fût habillée comme une princesse: on lui faisoit tous les jours des robes neuves, & on lui apprenoit à ne marcher que sur les pieds; il étoit impossible de trouver une guenon plus belle & de meilleur air: son petit visage étoit noir comme geai, avec une barbette blanche & des touffes incarnates aux oreilles ; ses menottes n'étoient pas plus grandes que les aîles d'un papillon, & la vivacité de ses yeux marquoit tant d'esprit, que l'on n'avoit pas lieu de s'étonner de tout ce qu'on lui voyait faire. (55)

Babiole is dressed as a princess, but she clearly does not have a truly royal body: each day she is made new dresses, and she is taught to walk on two feet. Cultural grooming is paramount in this passage. We see a clear negation of the animal, and a suppression of the bestial aspect of the monkey girl. However, d'Aulnoy's game of alternately humanizing and animalizing Babiole deserves mention. She is dressed as a royal body and taught to behave and carry herself as a human, but then, in the next sentence, she becomes the most beautiful and charming *guenon* in the world, which seems to be in direct opposition to the aforementioned idea of ugliness and to the term *guenon*, although the idea of possession emerges front and center. The supremacy of this particular animal and her value as a beautiful object is highlighted. D'Aulnoy's detailed description of Babiole's body captivates the reader: the animal-animal comparisons complicate Babiole's depiction, and relegate her even further into the realm of the bestial.

Importantly, d'Aulnoy chooses the adjective "black": "son petit visage étoit noir comme geai" (ibid.). A narrative of race inserts itself here: I would like to suggest that the exotic monkey becomes a metonym for colonized bodies of the territories during the *Ancien Régime*. This explicit blackness is an important signal, embedded in a narrative of animality, much in the same fashion that the colonized body was treated in the same manner as the animal—purchased, collected, displayed, and used. Continuing with this colonial optic, during the *Ancien Régime*, stories circulated of aristocratic women engaging in illicit affairs with pet monkeys, indigenous women coupling with apes deep in the forest, and some great apes, such as orangutans, were even thought to be a species of degenerate man.[6] As Frantz Fanon writes in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, "le Noir n'est pas un homme" and Fanon speaks about the colonized's extremely marginalized and dehumanized position (6). Babiole, much like the colonized, is

[6] Stories of aristocratic women engaging in illicit affairs with apes also existed; see Janson 268. In an eighteenth-century context, see Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and the two indigenous women being chased by monkeys. Candide sees the two women being pursued by monkeys nipping at their buttocks, and he shoots them, in order to save the women. The women are terribly distraught, because they reveal that the monkeys were not tormenting them, but the monkeys were, indeed, their lovers. Additionally, Alletz's *Histoire des singes et autres animaux curieux dont l'instinct & l'industrie excitent l'admiration des hommes, comme les Éléphans, les Castors, &c.* (1752) speaks about monkeys and apes at great length, and recounts the male ape's passion for women and a captain's wife giving birth to a male ape's two children. Finally, Restif de la Bretonne's *La découverte australe* (1781) relates the tale of the simian, César de Malaca, who writes a letter to his own species, decrying slavery. At one point, César mentions that apes do rape indigenous women if the occasion arises.

imprisoned deeply within her animalized body. "Babiole" shows a clear demarcation between French *salonnières'* and the other's body: the monkey girl becomes a symbol of the body that is dominated and controlled by those around her.

Continuing with a trope of animalization, d'Aulnoy specifically chooses to corporeally compare Babiole to a bird and a butterfly: both are winged creatures, capable of flight, and both are delicate and spiritual. A future intimation of flight might be implied, foreshadowing her escape to the forest, but d'Aulnoy seems instead to emphasize Babiole's bestiality. She then immediately strives to juxtapose this bestiality with a description of how full of vivacity and energy Babiole is. Specifically, when looking into her eyes, d'Aulnoy remarks that one can perceive the monkey girl's spirit or wit: her eyes mirror those of a cultivated aristocrat or *salonnière*. These two conflicting aspects of her character trouble the reader, forcing the reader to examine her own relationship to the bestial and the refined. The whole exercise that d'Aulnoy constructs is a self-reflexive reading.

It is here that we see both the reader and the author examining and reflecting their own messages of civility and incivility, beauty, ugliness and refinement. What is more, this rich excerpt from d'Aulnoy accentuates a shift in attitudes among Babiole's female relatives: her mother's initial self-reflexive episode steeped in horror contrasts with her aunt's self-reflexive quest to collect objects that reflect her own prowess and refinement as an aristocratic woman. In opposition to her mother, her aunt and her young cousin exhibit her. In the competition for the most rare and precious gem in the courtly realm, they insist on her refinement, on her finesse, on the fact that she is almost human, but not quite: their object of curiosity, or their little knick knack or toy, inhabits an abject space between the human and the beast, even if she is the most beautiful of beasts, as d'Aulnoy writes. However, this precision detailing her incomparable corporeal beauty as an animal and her spiritual attitude is curiously followed by a detailed description of her physical appearance, which is somewhat debonair, even refined, but it is the body, nevertheless, of a monkey: "il étoit impossible de trouver *une guenon* plus belle & de meilleur air" (55, my emphasis). In fact, "[S]on petit visage étoit noir comme geai, avec une barbette blanche & des touffes incarnates aux oreilles ; ses menottes n'étoient pas plus grandes que les aîles d'un papillon" (ibid.). This description recalls naturalist texts: the monkey becomes almost a stuffed animal, taxidermied, underneath a glass cloche, on display. Thus Babiole, the monkey princess, is not so repellent to her aunt or her cousin, the prince: she becomes a commodity, and her status as a creature between

beast and human princess is strangely compelling and attractive. She is no longer the product of a monstrous birth; her value rests in her difference in a society that esteems collections and oddities.

The objectification and display of her body continues: her refinement is cultivated even further. She is empathetic; when the prince cries, she does also. D'Aulnoy writes,

> Le prince, qui l'amoit beaucoup, la carressoit sans cesse; elle se gardoit bien de le mordre, & quand il pleuroit, elle pleuroit aussi. (55)

This passage brings up the notion of the Cartesian *bête-machine* and the issue of the problematic animal soul in "Babiole." Despite her imitative humanity, Babiole's underlying bestial nature is always present: she must hold herself back from biting the prince "qui l'amoit beaucoup" (ibid.). The animal inside her has to be checked and restrained, yet Babiole is capable of speaking; in this way, Babiole seems to complicate the Cartesian divide between human and animal. In the fifth part of the *Discours de la méthode* (1637), Descartes states that animals cannot speak as humans do; in short, they do not have the ability to say what they think. He writes, "[J]amais elles ne pourraient user de paroles ni d'autres signes en les composant, comme nous faisons pour déclarer aux autres nos pensées" (146). Cartesian philosophy was not foreign to the *conteuses*: we should remember that Descartes' ideas were being discussed by women in salons during the era, and d'Aulnoy would have been familiar with his work (Tucker, *Pregnant Fictions* 158).[7] D'Aulnoy and other *conteuses* would have been aware of the Cartesian idea that animals do not have a soul as humans do, and thus they are not capable of feeling pain or emotions the same way human beings do. It is notable that Descartes explicitly mentions monkeys in his text, stating that "s'il y avait de telles machines qui eussent les organes et la figure d'un singe ou de quelque autre animal sans raison, nous n'aurions aucun moyen pour reconnaître qu'elles ne seraient pas en tout de même nature que ces animaux" (145). He also writes that they resemble and imitate man, but that they are indeed not human (145–46). This part of the *Discours* develops the idea that the union of the soul and body characterizes a true human being, while an animal, or a *machine*, is the body

[7] Tucker, *Pregnant fictions,* 158, footnote 12: "D'Aulnoy, La Force and Lhéritier were united in friendship with Madame Deshoulières, whose interest in the writings of Descartes and his rival Gassendi was particularly well-known, and were no doubt guests at her home." Also see Harth's chapter "The Cartésiennes," in *Cartesian Women,* 64–122.

alone. D'Aulnoy's fairy tale complicates this union between the soul and the body. Babiole is constantly grappling with bestial, violent feelings: these primal, animal inclinations coupled with her human ability to speak specifically problematize the notion of the Cartesian animal-machine. Clearly, d'Aulnoy fractures here the Cartesian *bête-machine* by confounding the notion that animals do not speak and lack the ability to reason. Concerning this unclear limit between the animal and the human in d'Aulnoy's work, Patricia Hannon writes, "Aulnoy's metamorphosed characters look back towards a pre-Cartesian worldview wherein the boundaries between self and universe, human and natural, are less clearly drawn" (81).

This confounding of the animal-human Cartesian boundary is illustrated when one day, four years after her birth, Babiole begins to speak with a voice that is so sweet, clear and distinct—which touches the queen to such an extent that she gives Babiole her own menagerie, including dogs, cats, birds, squirrels and even her very own small horse (56). The collected thus becomes the collector herself by means of her own collection; to be a collector in this fashion implies an element of humanness. Here we see a perverse cycle of refinement unfolding. Moroever, to be refined, one must collect, and one must participate in the circulation and exchange of bibelots of the period.

The queen pushes the quest for refinement to extremes, by encouraging the idea that Babiole is a "guenuche née princesse" (56). The *guenuche*, carrying clear tones of ugliness as we previously discussed, once again collides with the refined. The monkey-princess continues to be culturally groomed:

> La reine lui donna des maîtres qui exercèrent bien la vivacité de son esprit ; elle excelloit à jouer du clavecin : on lui en avoit fait un merveilleux dans une huître à l'écaille: il venoit des peintres des quatre parties du monde, & particulièrement d'Italie pour la peindre; sa renommée voloit d'un pole à l'autre, car on n'avoit point encore vu une guenon qui parlât. (57)

First, it is interesting that d'Aulnoy tells the reader the queen arranged for instructors to train Babiole in order to cultivate the *vivacité de son esprit*: this training and this drawing out of energy, wit and spirit seem to be integral to Babiole's identity formation. Much like any aristocratic child, Babiole is being trained to become sophisticated and refined ; it is clearly a learned behavior, d'Aulnoy seems to say. Although there is something to be said about possessing an innate *esprit*, as Babiole clearly is endowed

with an aspect of inherent *esprit*—she was born human and transformed into an animal shortly thereafter—we are seeing Babiole's already inherent wit being groomed to the extreme. Cultivation and refinement are something to work towards, and they are not completely inherent to the soul—human *or* animal. Babiole, just like many *salonnières* of the period, is even taught to play a harpsichord, and is painted by famous artists from all over the world, yet she is so celebrated in the cultural atmosphere of the day because, as d'Aulnoy remarks, no one had ever seen a monkey that speaks. She is a wondrous spectacle, so very human, but not quite. Her body is a site of desire, an object to be possessed by a public, by artists, and by aristocrats. Her body becomes a mirror of their cultural values, and a place to inculcate their worldly tastes.

The zenith of her refinement is, however, represented by the fact that Babiole falls in love with her cousin, the prince. D'Aulnoy writes, "Babiole avoit un cœur, & ce cœur n'avoit pas été métamorphosé comme le reste de sa petite personne" (57). D'Aulnoy remarks here that Babiole has a heart, exactly as a human being does, and this could not be taken from her, in spite of her metamorphosed, bestial body. At an emotional level, Babiole is reacting exactly as a refined *salonnière* would. In the case of Babiole, she pathologizes the pain of her non-reciprocal love for the prince. When she confesses her love for the prince, he laughs (64). Babiole cannot sleep, and she is melancholy. Her refinement, so carefully cultivated by others and accepted as part of her identity, condemns her to be alone, and to be conscious of the fact that she is never going to live the dream of her aristocratic spirit. Babiole's ability to reason, paired with her cultivation that made her so famous, only underline her solitude: her predominantly human spirit is trapped in a monkey's body.

This animal-human tension, and the subsequent repulsion Babiole feels, manifests itself by a refusal to look in the mirror. Babiole is all too conscious of her curse. D'Aulnoy continues in the crucial mirror scene of the tale:

> elle ne se voyait jamais dans un miroir, que par dépit elle ne cherchât à le casser ; de sorte qu'on disoit ordinairement, le singe est toujours singe, Babiole ne sauroit se défaire de la malice naturelle à ceux de sa famille. (57–58)

Let us recall that mirrors were very popular objects at court during the Grand Siècle; mirrors were highly sought-after objects, and had been symbols of the rich aristocracy and "l'instrument du paraître" for a very long time. In fact, Melchior-Bonnet explains, mirrors functioned as a link between nature and culture and operated as conveying "leçons de civilité"

(11). Bérénice Le Marchand advances that the mirror is inextricably linked with fairy tales at the end of the seventeenth century, and that a study of the looking glass is crucial when trying to understand court society during Louis XIV's era (99). During this time, mirrors underlined beauty, finery and physical perfection. This scene of Babiole and her mirror tells the tale of a despised relationship with the mirror image. Ugliness and self-loathing is paramount in this episode. Babiole fears looking at herself, and is repulsed by her own "ugliness"; she is physically unacceptable to herself, as well as to others. In fact, the only time that Babiole looks into a mirror, she wishes to shatter it. Anne Defrance and Le Marchand both read this desire to break the mirror as a rejection of the self, in which she realizes that the reflection is not who she really is, or what she feels she is; however, I wish to push further here.[8] Although it is true that the mirror hides just as much as it reveals (Melchior-Bonnet 114), the reader and Babiole are cognizant of her imprisoned soul. Babiole's desire to shatter the mirror is a very strong reaction that relates to earlier intimations of violence, as when Babiole must hold herself back from biting her little cousin, the prince. Moreover, an emphasis on the fracturing of the image, or the animal self, is central to this portion of the text. The gap between the monkey and the human becomes irreconcilable; the accent is put on her ugly, non-human, bestial corporeality while her refined mind and cultivated spirit are exiled to an abject interstice.

Very similar themes are played out in an early nineteenth-century novel. Over a century later, another aristocratic woman of the salons, Claire de Duras (1777–1828), anonymously published a short novel, *Ourika*, in 1823. The striking similarities between "Babiole" and *Ourika* function as a concrete application of post-colonial theory. *Ourika* chronicles the life of a young Senegalese woman torn from her native land, enslaved, and consequently raised by a French family during the revolution. From the age of two onward, the aristocratic family that raises her with their son, Charles, culturally grooms her. Much like Babiole, Ourika falls in love with her young male counterpart, but this love can never be realized due to their differences. In the case of Babiole, her bestial body prevents their union; in the case of Ourika, it is her black body that forbids her to love and be loved. Duras' text contains a crucial mirror scene, so

[8] Le Marchand writes, "Le désir de briser le miroir symbolise le rejet du soi, Babiole ne tolère pas son image sachant qu'elle est autre que celle que le miroir lui projette" 135. Defrance, in *Les contes de fées et les nouvelles de Madame d'Aulnoy, 1690-1698* writes, "si dans le miroir le jeune enfant découvre son identité propre, l'animal découvre sa différence […] avec ce qu'il se sent être en réalité (Babiole)" 275.

very similar to the one in "Babiole," in which the heroine, Ourika, perceives herself with horror in the mirror, and goes so far as to connect the color of her skin with that of the simian:

> …souvent mes nuits entières se passaient à pleurer. J'épuisais ma pitié sur moi-même ; ma figure me faisait horreur, je n'osais plus me regarder dans une glace ; lorsque mes yeux se portaient sur mes mains noires, je croyais voir celles d'un singe ; je m'exagérais ma laideur, et cette couleur me paraissait comme le signe de ma réprobation ; c'est elle qui me séparait de tous les êtres de mon espèce, qui me condamnait à être seule, toujours seule ! jamais aimée ! Un homme, à prix d'argent, consentirait peut-être que ses enfants fussent nègres ! Tout mon sang se soulevait d'indignation à cette pensée. J'eus un moment l'idée de demander a Mme de B. de me renvoyer dans mon pays ; mais là encore j'aurais été isolée : qui m'aurait entendue, qui m'aurait comprise ? Hélas ! je n'appartenais plus à personne ; j'étais étrangère à la race humaine tout entière ! (15)

This scene from *Ourika* hearkens back to "Babiole": a connection with Babiole's own mirror scene and the repulsion of their own reflections is discursively clear. Although the two are separated by more than a hundred years, the connection between the black body and the simian is evident. The other, whether animal or the colonized, is cast outside of the realm of true beauty. In the end, Babiole is transformed into a human female and seems to achieve true refinement and beauty according to period ideals; in the case of Ourika, Charles chooses to marry another, and this devastating news devours Ourika, who dies from a broken heart in a convent, without her aristocratic family.

These scenes convey the fear of the other, the anxiety of incivility and unrefinement that is equated with ugliness and the bestial. At this point in Babiole's story, it seems that she is eternally punished, and forever condemned to imitate and mime the lives of human beings. Finally, Babiole's mirror scene speaks about the common maxim that *le singe est toujours singe*—the monkey will always remain the monkey, for many people. While mirrors generally reflect ephemeral and mutable images (Le Marchand 100), Babiole's looking glass interrogates whether Babiole, or any uncomely, courtly woman, can ever really change. In the context of Babiole's situation at this moment in the *conte*, it seems she cannot rid herself of the fairy's curse—she cannot break the *malice naturelle* con-

nected to her family, or the very same tainted reputation connected to the simian: Babiole is stripped of agency.

Thus the unsettled nature of imitation culminates at this point in the fairy tale. It is interesting to consider the ambassador-parrot who delivers a message from the monkey king, Magot, to the object of his kingly desire, Babiole.[9] The parrot is also a creature that mimes by its very nature. Pascal wrote, "Le bec du perroquet qu'il essuie quoiqu'il soit net" in his *Pensées* (104), showing that the parrot is an animal that behaves purely from instinct: he goes on wiping his beak, despite the fact that it is already clean. A human being would have realized that cleanliness had been achieved and ceased, due to higher cognitive abilities: namely, this is what Pascal terms as thinking, and the ability to truly think overcomes instinct. Additionally, let us once again return to Descartes and consider his following assertion:

> il n'est pas croyable qu'un singe ou un perroquet qui serait des plus parfaits de son espèce n'égalât en cela un enfant des plus stupides, ou du moins un enfant qui aurait le cerveau troublé, si leur âme n'était d'une nature du tout différente de la nôtre. (148)

Let us remember that, for Descartes, animals do not have a soul, and humans represent the union of the soul and the body. It is significant that the parrot and the monkey appear in d'Aulnoy's story, and that d'Aulnoy imbues the monkey with a troubled soul, while the parrot is portrayed more in line with the Pascalian and Cartesian discourses. D'Aulnoy illustrates this parrot and his capacity to imitate, or his ability to "deliver" the message of the monkey king. Thus the reader witnesses the imitation of a creature that imitates the human ; the parrot relays an imitated message to another creature that imitates the human : the monkey. We see the grouping of two imitators here. This chain is not accidental ; it serves to playfully underscore the succession of imitation and reflects courtly imitation itself. Furthermore, d'Aulnoy describes the parrot as "il n'étoit pas

[9] If the name *guenon/guenuche* implies a crazy, or ugly, woman, the term "magot" may be interpreted in three key ways, according the Académie Française dictionary of 1687. Firstly, *magot* denotes a simian. Equally, "On dit fig. d'un homme fort laid de visage, qu'*il est laid comme un magot,* que *c'est un vray magot, un laid magot.* On appelle, *Magot,* Un amas d'argent caché. *On a trouvé son magot. il avoit mis son magot dans la cave.*" In this way, another simian character in the *conte* is typified as ugly. Finally, Magot is connected with wealth—as he is kingly and quite rich. In brief, there is an accent on an overall negative image of the simian here, but d'Aulnoy makes a point to especially emphasize the shared ugliness of Magot and Babiole.

tout à-fait habillé à la mode," but he is an "assez bon poëte" (62). He is not full of spirit and vivacity, as Babiole is. D'Aulnoy remarks later in the text that he had "aucun bon modèle" (62), thus indicating to the reader that in order to imitate at an acceptable, fashionable and refined level, one must follow appropriate, and good, models. One imitates, but does so carefully and with prudence: too much imitation is dangerous. To successfully imitate requires well-bred refinement.

Imitation of the refined and the beautiful is evoked as powerful in this fairy tale. A moment before Babiole's final transformation, in which Babiole encounters her birth mother, deserves emphasis, for beauty is central to this scene. It is her physical refinement that saves Babiole. D'Aulnoy writes that Babiole has a beautiful face for an animal: "la reine venant à passer, demeura si vivement surprise de sa jolie figure" (72), and then the queen, her biological mother, takes Babiole into her arms. The queen offers her a place in her menagerie, thus casting Babiole once again as collector's object. Babiole replies :

> que puis-je ressentir lorsque je me vois dans mon miroir, petite, laide & noire, ayant des pates couvertes de poil, avec une queue & des dents toujours prêtes à mordre, & que d'ailleurs je ne manque point d'esprit, que j'ai du goût, de la délicatesse & des sentiments ? (74)

Again, the mirror becomes integral to seeing and being seen: Babiole perceives herself as ugly, small and black, hearkening back to a racially charged depiction. Not only that, but the bestial is linked to this racial portrayal, and again we see Babiole herself saying that her teeth are "toujours prêtes à mordre" (ibid.): violence and the simian walk hand in hand here. In addition to this violent rhetoric, the simian is clearly connected to the other, non-white body. However, Babiole claims that she is cultivated and witty: "d'ailleurs je ne manque point d'esprit, que j'ai du goût, de la délicatesse & des sentiments"—but notably not beautiful: "je me vois dans mon miroir, petite, laide & noire" (ibid.). The struggle between the beastly and the refined and its connection to beauty persists. The queen asks if Babiole is capable of tenderness, because, in the end, she is a beast, even if she is capable of speaking. At last, the queen realizes that Babiole is her daughter and she tries to sequester Babiole in a castle, for this time she feels that she cannot kill her own flesh and blood; she has so much spirit, this Babiole, and it is too bad that the child is just not natural (76). Again, the language hedges towards the domain of the "petit monstre." Babiole, as a monkey, is condemned by her aunt, her cousin the prince, and once again by her mother, to be alone for eternity. Babiole is a contaminated

mirror of her mother, and her female relatives in general, and an unsavory reminder of a tormented past inflicted by an evil fairy. Babiole reminds both the author and reader of the primitive and wild part of humans that we have tried so desperately to control and refine with our civilizing rituals and processes: Babiole carries the physical sign of savagery and unrefinement, yet she is also intellectually refined. The queen as well as readers of the *conte* would interpret her as a dangerous and uncontrollable hybrid package of civility against incivility.

It is only at the end of the tale, and only after the transformation of Babiole into a woman, that the prince and her mother finally accept her. Yet this freedom from the bestial is complicated indeed. King Magot and his gifts initiate her transformation from monkey to human. Earlier in the fairy tale, he gave Babiole a glass chest with an olive and a hazelnut (66). These two natural objects incite her metamorphosis in the forest; a kingdom magically springs up around her, and she is turned into a beautiful woman. It is fascinating that the ape, King Magot, instigates the metamorphosis of Babiole: it is the ape that promulgates the transformation of the monkey. Thus there will always be a simian aspect that lingers around the whole affair of the metamorphosis, and the simian nature of the entire incident will never completely be erased. However, it is only when Babiole is liberated from her ugly and bestial envelope that she becomes an acceptable partner for the prince. In the desert, she metamorphoses and "se rendit sur le champ si belle, que rien dans l'univers ne pouvoir l'égaler; elle se sentoit de grands yeux, une petite bouche, le nez bien fait, elle mouroit d'envie d'avoir un miroir" (78).

This is an extreme change from the previous desire to break a mirror when looking at her reflection as a monkey. Now she has an urgent desire to look at herself as a beautiful woman. The description of her corporeality is very much that of a *salonnière*, underlining white beauty and the autoreferentiality of the fairy tales; her small mouth and well-formed nose are physical hallmarks of Western beauty. But her beauty as a woman is not typical—it is superlative. The opposition between ugliness and refinement operates clearly here. When the prince visits Babiole's birth mother, he explains, "cette Babiole que vous avez vue si laide, est à présent la plus belle princesse de l'univers" (91). Again, we come back to these binaries of ugliness and refinement, and ugliness and beauty: the human world can only accept Babiole when her metamorphosed body is human, and only if she has seemingly rid herself of this mark of the beast. The ugly and the bestial are decidedly conflated in this tale.

In fact, as Furetière puts it, "La *laideur* et la beauté dependent du caprice et de l'imagination des hommes." It is key here that man, and his imagination, is the arbiter of deciding what is ugly, and what is beautiful. Furetière furthermore writes:

> BEAUTÉ, se dit figurément des choses spirituelles et morales, et même de toutes les choses qui nous donnent du plaisir à voir et à ouïr. La *beauté* de l'esprit, des sentiments est plus estimable que celle du corps. La *beauté* de la vertu, et la laideur du vice.

Beauty of the soul and of the spirit is held in higher esteem than physical beauty. In the case of Babiole, her animality limits her to the bestial realm. The fact that she is an animal strips away any chance of agency concerning her status as ugly or beautiful—only in human form is she able to avoid true ugliness. But once again Furetière reminds us, "La *beauté* est plus en imagination qu'en realité." Reading this in conjunction with "Babiole," a fairy tale that by its very nature is presented as being rooted in the imaginary, we see that perhaps d'Aulnoy is crafting a metadiscursive comment about the tenuous nature of beauty, and the fluctuating nature of ugliness and beauty in general. As for refinement, d'Aulnoy seems to suggest that the soul can be refined but not necessarily the body; beauty and refinement are not necessarily the same thing. D'Aulnoy wishes to show us a soul that is trapped inside a body: a refined soul in the debilitating and ugly package of the simian.

In conclusion, let us turn to the last part of the poem at the end of the tale that reveals d'Aulnoy's allusions to ugly women of the era:

> Elle osa choisir même un Prince pour amant.
> J'en connois bien encore dans le siècle où nous sommes,
> En qui d'une guenuche on trouve la laideur,
> Et qui pourtant des plus grands hommes
> Prétendent captiver le cœur ;
> Mais il faudroit en leur faveur,
> Que quelque enchanteur charitable
> Voulût bien leur donner, pour hâter leur Bonheur,
> Ainsi qu'à Babiole, une forme agréable. (93-94)

In order to make themselves socially acceptable to men of the period, contemporary women must seek out a charitable enchanter to give them a more pleasing and attractive form, such as Babiole's transformation from monkey to woman. Although Babiole escapes her cursed destiny as a monkey, perhaps other women of the period could not escape true ugli-

ness. These tropes of refinement, beauty, ugliness, animality, and race linger in the years following d'Aulnoy's fairy tales: we only have to return to Duras' *Ourika*, in which we see a heroine that is both animalized and colonized, that will never escape the curse of an imprisoned soul. Her physical differences spell out eternal abjection and alienation from *salonnières* and their aristocratic milieu.

The monkey is a figure conflated with evil, curses, ugliness, and women—but the monkey also reflects an aspect of sublimated humanity. The monkey allows us to see ourselves: it unwraps the primal part of the human, unmasking incivility. Ultimately, this mirroring and the monkey's imitation of the human are seen as dangerous, for this category of the bestial, the other, the uncontrollable, the nonwhite body, must be contained and controlled. This untamed possibility, or "ugliness," lies beyond the limit of accepted femininity: it forever rejects the chance of beauty. Refinement and beauty are indeed not mutually exclusive. The fairy tale, "Babiole," demands a complex reading: these polyvalent layers call into question ugliness *vis-à-vis* refinement and beauty, and the beast against the human, compelling the reader and the author to reflect on their own lives—these tensions culminate in an inescapable mirror. All of these categories attempt to define what exactly is human, and more specifically, what exactly is woman: is the monkey always monkey after all?

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