## Research Article

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## Ah!Nana's Fairytale Punk-Comics: From the Comtesse de Ségur's "Histoire de Blondine, Bonne-Biche et Beau-Minon" to Nicole Claveloux's "Histoire de Blondasse, de Belle-Biche et Gros Chachat"

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**Abstract:** During its brief existence from 1976 to 1978 the French underground feminist magazine *Ah!Nana* represented a powerful medium to discuss various topics related to women, sexuality, and discrimination. One of its main goals was to challenge traditional (literary) female role models, including housewives, submissive mothers, and "damsels in distress." Through the adaptation of fairy tales, a genre particularly suited through its imaginative worlds to challenge preconceptions and norms, *Ah!Nana* deconstructed and questioned binary gender roles and heteronormativity. This article analyzes cartoon artist Nicole Claveloux's queer adaptation of the nineteenth-century fairy tale "Histoire de Blondine, Bonne-Biche et Beau-Minon" (Blondine, the Good Doe, and the Gallant Cat) by the Comtesse de Ségur. Claveloux addresses her queer parody to an adult audience, and conveys a new perspective on gender, sexuality, and humanness that is in line with *Ah!Nana*'s promotion of second-wave feminist standpoints and punk culture. She advocates the exploration of new sexual pleasures, and the disruption of bourgeoisie values, including binary gender roles.

Keywords: queer, punk culture, fairy tales

The 1970s French underground feminist magazine *Ah!Nana* gave voice to female cartoon artists and writers, inspired by US punk and rock subcultures, and marginalized in a male-oriented field. During its brief existence from 1976 to 1978, *Ah!Nana* represented a powerful medium that discussed various topics related to women, sexuality, and discrimination. One of its main goals was to challenge traditional (literary) female role models, including housewives, submissive mothers, and "damsels in distress." Through the adaptation of fairytales, a genre particularly suited through its imaginative worlds to challenge preconceptions and norms, *Ah!Nana* deconstructed and questioned binary gender roles and heteronormativity. While it is true that fairy tales can be "used to enshrine normative heterosexual love," Seifert invites us to pay "closer attention to the journey fairytale characters make" without "letting ourselves get overly preoccupied with their destination." This analytical approach allows for a "queer critical strategy" that will help us focus on "moments of nonnormative desires and relations" ("Introduction" 18).

In *Ah!Nana*'s first volume, published in 1976, French cartoon artist Nicole Claveloux applied such a queer critical strategy when she adapted the nineteenth-century fairytale "Histoire de Blondine, Bonne-

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Biche et Beau-Minon" (Blondine, the Good Doe, and the Gallant Cat) by the Comtesse de Ségur which was part of Ségur's fairytale collection "Nouveaux Contes de fées pour les petits enfants" ("New fairytales for small children," 1856). Claveloux knew Ségur's work well. This was not only because of Ségur's popularity and the fact that 1974, 2 years before the publication of Claveloux's adaptation, marked the centennial of Ségur's death and was therefore "a particularly fruitful year for articles, expositions, and celebrations of her work" (Luton 6). Claveloux had already illustrated Ségur's "Histoire de Blondine, Bonne-Biche et Beau-Minon" in 1970 under the title The Forest of Lilac for the American children's book publisher Harlin Quist. Her 1976 adaptation in Ah!Nana, however, was intended for an adult audience only and went well beyond heteronormativity depicted by Ségur.

Claveloux's comic adaptation emphasized and queered underlying nonnormative aspects that already existed in Ségur's tale regarding gender roles and the metamorphosis from humans to animals.<sup>1</sup> For instance, Claveloux's and Ségur's adventurous princess enjoys a certain degree of agency, which in Ségur's tale opposes her to the passive prince awaiting to be delivered from an evil enchantment through her help. Contrary to Ségur's tale, however, Claveloux's diegesis is not based on a moral framework; consequently, transgressions remain unpunished. Furthermore, Ségur diminishes clear distinctions between humans and animals by means of transbiology, a term that Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill define as "animals or humans who masquerade as or transform into another species (in whole or in part) and/or who otherwise mess with hard-and-fast distinctions between species, including between human and nonhuman" (5). Claveloux, however, goes beyond Ségur's use of transbiology by depicting sexual relations between humans and animals.

This article focuses on Claveloux's witty, parodical, and queer rewriting of Ségur's fairy tale in which Claveloux celebrates the admirable monstrosity of her female protagonists whose sexual gratification and search for pleasure are not limited by societal and moral norms. More specifically, I will examine the representation of gender identity, moral frameworks, including female education as integral part of inculcating moral values, and transbiology in Ségur's tale and in Claveloux's queer adaptation. Furthermore, this article analyzes Claveloux's disruption of the conventions of the fairytale genre through her use of metalepses and the self-reflexive demystification of comics' fictional production. Because of its spatial structure, comics<sup>2</sup> invites the reader to fill in the gaps between the different panels and therefore to participate in the creation of the comics' fictional world. Claveloux's queer parody conveys a new perspective on gender, sexuality, and humanness that is in line with Ah!Nana's promotion of second-wave feminist standpoints and punk culture, advocating the exploration of new sexual pleasures,<sup>3</sup> and the disruption of bourgeoisie values, including binary gender roles. 4 Claveloux's work also foreshadows twenty-first-century queer concepts, including José Esteban Muñoz's "disidentification," as well as theories on post-humanism and new materialism explored, among others, by Nathan Snaza and Karen Barad.

In Ségur, gender roles, ethics, and education seem, most of the time, intrinsically aligned. For instance, one of the main characteristics of princess Blondine is her kindness that she will develop further by the end of the tale in becoming more obedient and patient. After the untimely passing of her mother Queen Doucette, her father Bénin, a caring and clement king (Ségur 6), marries the mean and perfidious princess Fourbette. Their common daughter Brunette mistreats Blondine, who is, however, too good-hearted to tell

<sup>1</sup> According to Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill, "defining principles of queer also include an emergent body of literature that addresses issues specifically dealt with in fairy tales: concerns about marginalization, oddity, and not fitting into society generally" (5); nonbinary gender roles and human-to-animal transformations are part of this queer oddity discussed by Turner and Greenhill.

<sup>2</sup> I follow the standard common among comics scholars according to which the word comics is plural but used with a singular verb (Chute 5).

<sup>3</sup> While feminist scholar Jane Gallop criticizes the construct of the sexually liberated woman during the sexual revolution of the late sixties as another form of patriarchal domination (92), the access to contraception and the promotion of nonheteronormative sexualities, endorsed for example by the Radical feminists, brought to light alternative forms of sexuality.

<sup>4</sup> Ah!Nana artists Olivia Clavel and Eléctric Clito, for instance, promoted in volume 1 transsexual relationships and denounced hate crimes.

on her malicious stepsister. Through the diminutive suffix -ette, Ségur creates a link between Fourbette, Brunette, and Doucette to distinguish them from Blondine. Their names derive, respectively, from the adjectives "fourbe" (deceitful, sly), "brune" (brown), and "douce" (sweet). Brunette and Fourbette are both Blondine's antagonists: the former ill-treats and harms her; the latter tries to have Blondine killed by sending her into the enchanted lilac forest from which it is impossible to escape.

Because of her disobedience of her father's orders not to leave the castle, Blondine has not yet fully developed her mother Doucette's ideal feminine traits of submission and deference, which causes the distinction in their names by means of different suffixes. Ségur stresses Bénin's strict punishments in the case of disobedience (10), yet she also emphasizes his great affection for his daughter, especially after his wife's passing:

Le roi aimait tendrement Blondine, et Blondine aimait le roi plus que personne au monde. Le roi lui donnait les plus beaux joujoux, les meilleurs bonbons, les plus délicieux fruits. Blondine était très heureuse. (6-7)

The king loved Blondine tenderly, and Blondine loved the king more than anyone else in the world. The king gave her the most beautiful toys, the best candy, the most delicious fruit. Blondine was very happy. (My translation)

This close relationship between Blondine and her father weakens the binarism of gender roles. While the economic and social roles of male and female characters in Ségur's diegesis are not always equivalent and interchangeable, it would be a mistake to interpret this fact as a clear opposition of gender roles. In fact, Claudine Giacchetti observes in Ségur's oeuvre the tendency of male characters taking over maternal functions and replacing the often-missing maternal figure (196). This is certainly true for Blondine's relationship with her father King Bénin, whose name indicates his good-heartedness and caring nature. His affection and forgiving character set him apart from the maliciousness of Blondine's stepmother. As soon as he learns of Blondine's disappearance in the lilac forest, he loses control over his emotions and runs into the woods, trying to find his lost daughter. His servants intervene and prevent the inconsolable and frantic king from putting himself in danger. In a dramatic scene, Bénin keeps crying out his daughter's name and abandons himself to his despair (36). This portrayal of a tenderly loving father, broken-hearted over the fate of his missing daughter, distinguishes him from an authoritarian king and patriarch and highlights character traits traditionally associated with maternal figures who sacrifice themselves to rescue their children.5 Therefore, in Ségur traditional aspects of gender identity and gender roles can, at times, be complexified and clear boundaries undone.

Claveloux's version goes further by undoing boundaries between gender roles and even species through the emphasis of sexual pleasure. She thereby creates a queer punk tale that alludes to classic fairytale conventions and associated moral frameworks while playfully undermining them. This subversion concerns form as well as content. For instance, Claveloux's comics begins with the portrayal of a female narrator, depicted as a witch, with warts on her nose and a menacing smile on her toothless mouth. Her face looks almost scarred by the exaggerated quantity of wrinkles, her right eye stares at the reader, while the left side of her face is covered in shadows. Because of the domestic aspect of the white bonnet she is wearing, her portrayal could refer in a humoristic way to the "lower-class tale-spinners" and wet nurses that were believed to be at the origin of seventeenth-century French fairytale tradition (Seifert, "Comments on Fairy Tales," 278).6 The female narrator could also allude in a self-mocking manner to Claveloux herself, whose name is featured in Claveloux's handwriting next to the portrait of the old woman. As Hillary L. Chute reminds us, handwriting, which is an important "feature of the composition of comics [...] carries, whether or not the narrative is autobiographical, what we may think of as a trace of autobiography in the mark of its maker." For Chute, the fact that "the same hand is both writing and drawing the narrative in

<sup>5</sup> One of the most dramatic examples of a selfless mother is, according to Domna C. Stanton, Jean Racine's eponymous heroine Andromaque, devoted mother and loyal wife, who considers suicide to save her son Astyanax from certain death (19).

<sup>6</sup> Suzanne Magnini and Charlotte Trinquet du Lys, however, have shown that the seventeenth-century French fairytales have their origin in the sixteenth-century Italian favole.

comics leads to a sense of the form as diaristic" ("Introduction," 10). The image of the old woman could also be an irreverent allusion to Ségur who, in the preface of her fairytale collection "Nouveaux Contes de fées," refers to herself as grandmother. Yet, Claveloux's old woman does not resemble the gentle storyteller Ségur's preface invites us to imagine. The deformity of her face is frightening and uncanny, thereby announcing Claveloux's irreverent and deviant rewriting of Ségur's original.

The narrator begins her tale following fairytale conventions ("Il était une fois"; once upon a time), however, Claveloux subverts these norms through the dismissal of the omniscient narrator and, by means of metalepses, lets the characters take charge of the plot. While the female narrator begins to introduce Claveloux's version of Ségur's King Bénin, named King Benêt (simpleton), he interrupts her and takes over her function. He briefly mentions the death of his wife, Queen Douceâtre, introduces his daughter Blondasse, and expresses his desire to remarry. The dismissal of the female narrator could be interpreted as a "mechanism for breaking the fairy-tale frame" and for negotiating "contestively [sic] between the world that the authoritative fairy tale describes" (Preston 198) and the world that Claveloux creates in her comics. Contrary to Ségur's carefully structured diegesis by means of an omniscient narrator that leads to a traditional happy ending, Claveloux's tale seems more disrupted, almost anarchical, due to the characters' appropriation of the narration through their monologues and dialogues. As Cathy Lynn Preston reminds us "in postmodernity the 'stuff' of fairy tales exists as fragments" that we "identify as cultural knowledge" (210). Claveloux playfully engages with the readers' cultural knowledge of fairy tales – through the codified beginning of her comics ("Il était une fois") - and with Ségur's original through the title and the loose adaptation of the plot. Yet, she emphasizes the fictionality of the fairytale genre by evocating its conventions and by transgressing them at the same time, self-reflexively calling attention to the construction of her comics by means of the metalepses.

Claveloux's disruption of the fairytale genre also comprises the lack of opposition between good and evil. She replaces the characters that embody in Ségur's tale kindness and virtue (King Bénin, Blondine, Doucette) with characters epitomizing stupidity and lack of (self) reflection, as is shown in the names of King Benêt and princess Blondasse. The replacement of the diminutive suffix -ine of Blondine's name in the original with the derogatory suffix -asse in Claveloux's adaptation negatively connotes the princess, while the name of Douceâtre lampoons the sweet character traits of Ségur's Doucette by means of the derogatory suffix -âtre. The portrayal of the king and his daughter further highlight their unflattering character traits: Benêt is fat and old, his bald head is covered with pearls, and his idiotic smile betrays his lack of intelligence (Claveloux 5). While Blondasse, a toddler with pigtails, wonders why she dislikes her stepmother, the reasons for her animosity are self-evident to the reader: Blondasse's stepmother is first depicted as a she-devil with a tail, horns, and glowing eyes. In the following portrait, she resembles a female punk. Her head is shorn, her forehead and cheeks are tattooed, she is wearing long metal earrings, and skulls are printed on her blouse. Her horns are decorated with pearls and her open mouth uncovers her vampire teeth while she is wondering how to get rid of her "loud and stupid" stepdaughter ("gamine bruyante et stupide," Claveloux 7). Contrary to Ségur's tale, there is no clear moral distinction between Blondasse and her stepmother who both seem to be lacking virtue and rectitude.

In Claveloux, the absence of ethical standards is combined with the ethos of pleasure-seeking. In Ségur's original Bénin is forced by his ministers to remarry even though he is still mourning his beloved wife, and only accepts for Blondine's sake, in need of a new maternal figure (7). In Claveloux's version, however, Benêt decides to remarry to gratify his sexual whims and presents Blondasse with a fait accompli, announcing to her his upcoming wedding for the following day (5). This panel is the only one that features Benêt as authoritative figure. He is towering over his daughter who seems to be looking up at him in a fearful state, since she expresses in the next panel her foreboding of an unpleasant future. Yet, Benêt's imposing attitude quickly vanishes with the arrival of the new queen whose fierce appearance indicates a reversal of traditional gender hierarchies. The panel following the first encounter between the stepmother, depicted as a punk, and Blondasse (6) reveals an unbalanced patch-work-family: Blondasse, sad-looking

<sup>7</sup> In Ségur's original, Blondine is 3 years old when her father remarries (7).

and pouting, occupies the center of the image. She is surrounded by three toads, looking at her affectionately and trying to console her from her worries that she expresses in her speech bubble: "La vie de famille ne tarda pas à devenir intenable [...]." (And soon family life became unbearable, Claveloux 6).

The background of the panel explains Blondasse's agitation: her father and his new wife engage in an openly sexual relationship, oblivious to the presence and needs of the princess. The background shows a naked King Benêt, chased by his wife whose only attire is her stiletto leather boots with which she is kicking his bare behind. Both have a smile on their faces, while engaging in a "sadomasochistic" chase through the castle, which seems to underscore their satisfying (sexual) relation. This impression is reinforced by the structure of the staircase railing that figures next to the naked Benêt and his spouse and might lead to the couple's bedroom. The pillars of the staircase resemble erect penises, and a giant downward-pointing triangular flower-arrangement hanging from the staircase could allude to a pubic mound. The depiction of nudity and references to genitals create a charged sexual ambiance which is confirmed in the next panel portraying the "result" of Benêt's sexual encounters with his wife: Blondasse's stepsister, a diabolical newborn with vampire teeth, is suckling a giant breast.

The relationship between King Benêt and his devilish new wife, who instead of the proverbial pants is wearing the boots in the royal household, is opposed to traditional gender relations between King Bénin and Queen Fourbette. Bénin is feared by his spouse and subjects alike for his incorruptible sense of justice. After Blondine's disappearance into the lilac forest, Queen Fourbette shows so little grief that the king repudiates her, sending her back to her father who locks her in a tower where she dies out of rage and spite. As for Brunette, Blondine's malignant stepsister, Bénin marries her off to the Prince Violent who physically abuses her and in so doing "reforms" her mean character (37). The reversal of traditional gender relations in Claveloux is linked to the search of pleasure and consequently to the absence of obedience, punishment, and justice in her rewriting, which are, however, main aspects in Ségur's tale, as is evident in three narrative elements of Ségur's fairy tale: the queen's failed tentative to have Blondine killed, Blondine's education to become an accomplished member of the aristocracy; and her redemption of her disobedience toward authoritative figures.

In the scene of the failed attempt on Blondine's life, Ségur maintains the "bipolar view of women" (Haase 12) as either good or evil, by justifying Blondine's disobedience to leave her father's kingdom by the fact that her page Gourmandinet was bribed by the queen to take her to the enchanted forest. Tempted by the beauty of the lilacs growing in the forest, Blondine decides to leave the royal park to pick some flowers for her father. Hence, the responsibility of Blondine's insubordination is implicitly attributed to her page and her stepmother. Also, her misbehavior is motivated by her wish to please her father and therefore is not based on selfishness, contrary to the page's corrupted character and the stepmother's cruel wish to have Blondine perish. Consequently, Blondine's faux pas does not associate her with her female antagonists Fourbette and Brunette who impersonate baseness and wickedness. What is more, Blondine's disobedience also enables her through her adventures in the forest to acquire knowledge and improve her morality. During her time in the forest, she is rescued by the cat Beau-Minon (Gallant Cat) and his mother Bonne-Biche (Good Doe) who welcome her into their enchanted castle and let her undergo a thorough education. Bonne-Biche is in truth a benevolent fairy, named accordingly Fée Bienveillante, and Beau-Minon is a good-looking prince. Both have been transformed into animals by a wicked genie and must await Blondine's rescue to regain their human shape.

During her sojourn at Bonne-Biche's castle, the illiterate Blondine is put to sleep for 7 years, during which time she not only acquires the skills of playing music, painting, and drawing, but also reads most of the books contained in the castle's library. She awakens at the age of 14 and acknowledges a profound improvement in her "esprit" and "cœur" (mind and heart, Ségur 34). Bonne-Biche underscores the importance of education for girls, by stating, almost scornfully, that at the age of seven Blondine knew nothing, not even how to read (33).

This emphasis of obedience and punishment is absent in Claveloux's adaptation. As soon as the "punkqueen" bribes the dishonest page to drive Blondasse into the forest, she disappears from the diegesis, leaving it open if she will be punished for her misdeed and if King Benêt will even grieve his missing daughter. The next panel shows the page driving a delighted Blondasse through an arid and desert-like landscape; the upper-right corner contains a small portrayal of the dishonest page, sweat-covered and with a dire-looking face, addressing the reader and acknowledging that "little Jesus" will certainly punish him for his crimes (7). This comment serves to emphasize the criminal aspect of his actions and his fear of divine punishment, which, in Ségur's version, is indeed efficient and violent. After Queen Fourbette rewards Gourmandinet with a trunk filled with candy and sends him away on a donkey, the page is thrown off by the stubborn animal and dies instantly. Ségur makes it a point to stress that nobody mourned him, thereby underscoring his well-deserved retribution (19). Yet again, as in the case of the stepmother, Claveloux does not continue this narrative thread and leaves it open if the "petit Jésus" (7) will indeed chastise the abominable page. The absence of clear moral structures and guidelines therefore creates an "anarchistic" universe that is also highlighted by Claveloux's sarcastic portrait of Belle-Biche, the counterpart of Blondine's female mentor in Ségur, and whom Claveloux depicts as stupid and self-centered.

The title of Claveloux's comics already expresses her parodical and humoristic portrayal of Ségur's characters. As we have seen, her "Histoire de Blondasse, de Belle-Biche et gros Chachat" portrays the princess and the king as dumb and volatile. Furthermore, Ségur's Good Doe becomes in Claveloux's adaptation "Beautiful Doe." This antonomasia emphasizes the opposition between the human appearance of Fée Bienveillante and her animal counterpart: the epithet "belle" that substitutes together with the noun "doe" the proper name for the Fée Bienveillante does not correspond in Claveloux's rewriting to the queen's repulsive and decrepit appearance once she regains her human body. Thereby Claveloux sarcastically states that the Fée Bienveillante was more attractive as a doe than as a human. Lastly, Ségur's "Gallant Cat" becomes in Claveloux's adaptation the "Fat Kitty Cat," hardly an appropriate name for a handsome prince.

The renaming of these three main characters in Claveloux's comics foreshadows the divergence in their traits with their counterparts in Ségur's original, and consequently predicts the different ending of Claveloux's version, which culminates in Blondasse's and gros Chachat's offspring: a "litter" of four babies with human and feline features. Moreover, the fact that neither the corrupted page, the stepmother, nor her devilish-looking baby-daughter (Brunette's counterpart in Claveloux's adaptation) have names seems to indicate that their character traits are sufficient to embody the narratological function of the antagonistic stepmother, stepsister, and servant. Their diabolic features are clearly emphasized by iconographic references to the devil, such as horns (the stepmother and stepdaughter, Claveloux 6), tails (the page and the stepmother, Claveloux 6–7), goat legs, and cloven hooves (the page, Claveloux 7). The vicious physical features of these characters stand for themselves and need not be highlighted by antonomasia. The self-evidence of their maliciousness might also suggest the ubiquity of evil in Claveloux's diegesis and underscore the absence of any valid, even if ambivalent, moral framework based on education.

Yet, in Ségur's tale the importance of education for young girls is emphasized, a topic that was also of major importance to the participants of the *querelle des femmes*, the centuries-old quarrel over the role and function of women in society, their character traits and capacities, and their relations to the opposite sex. As Domna C. Stanton explains:

[the] connection between *pouvoir* and *savoir* [was] the key issue in the *querelle des femmes* of the early-modern period, [that] underlay the many issues over the education of girls and women that were debated, for example: the extent to which the second sex was even capable of instruction (if she was still regarded as the essence of irrationality, the passions and the material body, in contrast to man as mind, reason and spirit); the kind of education best suited to her function and status (particular or exceptional, public or private, noble or bourgeois); and the sites where learning could or should take place (the convent, *les petites écoles*, at home or in salons. (23)

These questions persisted into the nineteenth century and Ségur's fairy tale was part of this debate. According to Marie-Christine Vinson, Ségur complied with the preferred pedagogical method of the first half of the nineteenth century which consisted of educating girls under the supervision of their devoted mothers (146). Following the pedagogical guidelines of her time-period, Ségur mentions in her work instructions including grammar, arithmetic, geography, as well as language acquisition and fine arts (149). Vinson underlines, however, the limited function that education plays in Ségur's diegesis, often mentioned with the sole purpose of indicating the passing of time that separates the daily routine of lessons

from extraordinary activities. According to Vinson, the main purpose of education in Ségur's œuvre is to highlight distinctions in social class and gender norms (154) and focuses mainly on inculcating religious morals (147).

While Vinson's study centers on three of Ségur's novels,8 these works share some elements with Ségur's fairy tale. They belong to the genre of educational literature and follow Cicero's principles of docere et delectare (to teach and delight).9 Blondine's education has similar functions to the ones described in the three novels: it accelerates the narrative time through the ellipse that contains Blondine's education thereby indicating the passing of time. Furthermore, the description of Blondine's skills after she awakens from her 7-year long slumber corresponds to the typical instruction of girls that Ségur describes in her novels and indicate Blondine's social standing. It is also true that Blondine's final happiness depends more on her virtues than on her intellectual skills. Blondine can return to her father only after she sincerely regrets not having followed Fée Bienveillante's orders forbidding Blondine to leave her castle. Blondine must prove her "soumission" (submission 70) and undergo her punishment, a long and annoying travel on the back of a turtle without uttering a word, before she can reunite with her father and marry Beau-Minon, after he regained his human appearance.

Blondine's punishment emphasizes gender norms that underscore silence, patience, and obedience as the most important characteristics of women. Had Blondine been patient and obedient for her entire sojourn at the Fée Bienveillante's, she would have eventually been allowed to return to her father (40). Blondine's punishment also stresses the importance of moral improvement through its critique of ingratitude and vanity, which are the main reasons for Blondine's disregard of Fée Bienveillante's orders. Despite her continuing education provided by her hostess, whom she sees however only during her lessons and mealtimes, Blondine starts to grow lonesome and wishes to return to her father. She therefore becomes susceptive to the empty promises of an evil enchanter, disguised as a parrot, who pretends to lead her back to her father's abode. Through insincere compliments on her beauty, skills, and wit, the last two qualities being perfected by Fée Bienveillante's teaching, the enchanter appeals to Blondine's vanity, turning her obligations toward her benefactor into ingratitude, which eventually culminates in Blondine's misbehavior and is followed by her punishment.

Even though Blondine's punishment focuses on her disobedience, it is also her indebtedness toward the fairy and her son that is stressed in several passages of the tale, either by Blondine herself (43, 52), the omniscient narrator (45) or by enchanted animals like the speaking toad (53). It is telling that the main reason for Blondine's obligation is her education that she received from her benefactors, which stresses the value of learning. The importance of education is furthermore underscored by the fact that Blondine could have avoided falling into the parrot's trap, had she used her intelligence. As the omniscient narrator states, a speaking doe who has servants and is treated like a queen and dedicates 7 years to the education of an ignorant little girl should have been proof enough that Bonne-Biche is in truth a fairy godmother. Instead of questioning the parrot's misrepresentation of Bonne-Biche, Blondine trusts him blindly (45). The benefit and usefulness of education explain Blondine's obligation toward Bonne-Biche and her son, and contrary to Vinson's affirmation, attest that education is valued in Ségur, at least in her fairy tale. Even though it is not at the center of the plot, the author underscores its importance: intellectual skills go hand in hand with moral values.

Ségur also shows the complexities and intricacies of moral behavior, since Blondine's disobedience is caused by her wish to reunite with her father. Her attachment to her father and her wish to please him were also at the origin of Blondine's first transgression when she decided to enter the lilac forest. Her misconduct is therefore, at least partially, excused, since it is based on her love for her father. Furthermore, her disobedience represents the condition sine qua non of delivering Bonne-Biche and Beau-Minon from their enchantment, allowing them to regain their human shape and Blondine to return the favor to her

<sup>8</sup> Les Petites Filles Modèles (1857), Les Malheurs de Sophie (1858), and Les Vacances (1859).

<sup>9</sup> As Charlotte Trinquet (71,72) has shown, the link between educational literature and fairy tales dates back to Charles Perrault and the literary standards of the Académie française.

benefactors. Only by disobeying Bonne-Biche could Blondine confront her evil spirit ("mauvais genie," 68) and thereby break the spell put on her benefactors.

As Bonne-Biche explains to Blondine after having recovered her human appearance, the wicked genie of the lilac forest had changed her and her son into animals because of her son's negligence, without specifying further the prince's *faux pas*. The condition of their deliverance was tied to Blondine picking a rose which contained the princess' wicked spirit. Bonne-Biche tried to prevent Blondine from facing her evil side. Yet Blondine's encounter with the rose was necessary to complete her formative and spiritual education, which paradoxically depended on Blondine's disregard of her father's and Fée Bienveillante's orders. This allowed her to truly repent and accomplish her moral perfection. Eventually Blondine resembles her mother Doucette in that she succeeded throughout her punishment in being "docile et bonne" (docile and good, Ségur 28) without letting temptation and curiosity divert her from the path of virtue. Consequently, her disobedience and ensuing remorse accentuate the distinction between Blondine and her female antagonists, Fourbette and Brunette, through the former's righteousness, and differentiate her from Fourbette, Brunette, and Doucette, who are simple character models, whereas Blondine's character evolves at the end of the plot.

Blondine's disregard of Bonne-Biche's orders therefore has a positive and teleological function that completes Blondine's final metamorphosis from a girl with good dispositions to the female ideal of virtue, patience, and honesty, and brings the narrative to its conclusion by the conventional happy ending. Despite the paradoxical merit of Blondine's disobedience, Ségur emphasizes at the same time the value of obedience, based on virtue as well as on education, and thereby creates a tension between contradictory behaviors that is not fully resolved. A similar tension is also noticeable in the depiction of Blondine's two benefactors. Even though the prince is a supportive character, his agency is limited. Contrary to Bonne-Biche, he is not able to communicate with Blondine in her own language and interacts with her only through gestures and meows (38, 39). Despite his participation in Blondine's education during her 7-year long sleep, Blondine's gratitude is mainly directed toward Bonne-Biche who is also the one who continues the lessons with her pupil after she awakens. Beau-Minon therefore plays a less important role than Blondine's female mentor Bonne-Biche. While Blondine's obligation to both is stressed in several passages, it seems that their support stands in the way of Blondine's moral development. Both try to prevent her from confronting her evil spirit, by keeping her locked in their castle. It almost seems as if this protective measure is comparable to a prison, as the parrot had pointed out to Blondine when trying to persuade her to leave Bonne-Biche (42). While Bonne-Biche's decision to keep Blondine's evil spirit hidden is a sign of selfsacrifice, since she would not be able to regain her human appearance, it also sheds, at least partially, a negative light on Fée Bienveillante and her son, for they deprive Blondine of an important experience.

Furthermore, the ambivalence in the prince's portrayal is stressed by the fact that his misconduct led not only to his but also to his mother's metamorphosis, and that he depends on Blondine's intervention to become human again. Through the prince's depiction as fallible, frail, and passive, Ségur avoids "a single dominant interpretation of men, masculinity and the male body against which a fully constructed, victimized female is set" (Stanton 6) and allows for a more complex representation of gender identity that emphasizes shortcomings and accomplishments as a universal experience. This tension is inherent in texts that try to grapple with "questions and constructions of sexuality, gender, and power" (Haase 19). Conformity to gender norms is necessary for the subject to be recognizably human and "represents that contingent precondition in texts for the articulation and practice of (some degree of) resistance and oppositional differentiation – a dynamic, dialectical process that is truly 'never settled once and for all'" (Stanton 5). According to Donald Haase, this dialectical process is typical of the fairytale genre, since "the diversity and ambiguity of fairy tales produced by women in Germany and France during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries [happened] in tandem with the emergence of the modern European literary fairy tale during that same period." This new genre "aligned very quickly with the values and perspectives of

<sup>10</sup> It is true that Brunette changes at the end of the tale. Her husband le Prince Violent brutally punishes her misbehaviors and in so doing "improves" her character. Yet, the development of Brunette is not as radical as Blondine's.

patriarchy" (18–19). Consequently, the institutionalization of the European fairy tale incited a "struggle over questions and constructions of sexuality, gender, and power" (Haase 19). Ségur participated in this debate through the depiction of traditional aspects of gender identity and gender roles, as well as through the representation of subversive elements, including the substitution of a maternal figure by a male character and the emphasis on female agency even though ambivalent because of the eventual punishment of the princess' disobedience.

Claveloux seemed to have sensed the inherent tensions in Ségur's ambivalent representation of gender norms and values and took this ambivalence one step further by depicting a fictional universe where characters are encouraged to gratify their whims. Contrary to Bonne-Biche, Belle-Biche does not teach Blondasse how to read and write, play music, draw and paint, nor do her guidelines and rules reveal any moral values, but are limited to a nonsensical enumeration of proverbs. Clearly parodying Bonne-Biche's maxim that Blondine should not worry about the future and that wisdom is always rewarded (27). Claveloux lets Belle-Biche repeat Bonne-Biche's two statements, followed by: "que rien ne sert de courir, qu'il faut partir à temps et que pierre qui roule n'ammasse pas mousse" (it is useless to run, you have to leave on time, and a rolling stone gathers no moss, meaning that one needs to settle down to accumulate wealth, 10).

This absurd and meaningless enunciation of banalities question Belle-Biche's supportive role she fulfilled in Ségur's tale. In addition, Belle-Biche's only interest lies in regaining her human appearance which is a further distinction from Ségur's counterpart. While Bonne-Biche prefers to keep her animal appearance to spare Blondine her encounter with her evil spirit and her ensuing punishment (69), Belle-Biche expresses immediately after having met Blondasse her desire to become human again (11). As discussed earlier, Bonne-Biche's decision to suffer her animal appearance is selfless despite its ambivalence. Belle Biche's wish to regain her human shape, on the contrary, is selfish. By inverting the desires and wishes of Ségur's fairy godmother, Claveloux emphasizes the antithetical structure of her adaptation.

Given the absence of moral guidelines, Belle Biche's wish does not require any major accomplishments on Blondasse' side nor an arduous punishment as in Ségur's original. Rather, Belle-Biche's transformation depends on a talisman in the form of a peg that is being kept under a glass cover for everyone to see (11). Yet, the desperate Belle-Biche complains that during the 4,000 years she has been living as a doe in her enchanted castle, she was not able to find this talisman, whose supposed uniqueness is parodied by its familiarity. In the panels describing Belle-Biche's fate and her metamorphosis, Claveloux mocks her stupidity as well as Ségur's moral framework that underlies her fairy tale: Belle-Biche, like Blondasse's father, does not educate Blondasse according to specific rules and orders, nor does she teach her any skills. Her morality consists in empty proverbs and in following her whims, which is the only value she seems to inculcate in Blondasse and Gros Chachat. As soon as she recovers her human appearance, she leaves the castle running, eager to enjoy her life (12). Interestingly, her metamorphosis does not extend to Gros Chachat, who prefers his feline appearance after having witnessed his mother's decrepitude but does engender a transformation in Blondasse: her pigtails change into a mohawk hairstyle which creates a link between Blondasse and her stepmother and stepsister, indicating that Blondasse has now adopted the egotistical search of pleasure embodied by the latter two.

It is true that Blondasse' stepsister does not engage in any sexual activities, yet the two panels in which she appears depict her acting in a self-indulgent manner. In the first panel she is eagerly sucking her mother's breast, while in the second she is portrayed hungrily and heartily biting Blondasse' shin as if it was her mother's bosom. Claveloux is underlining in both panels the stepsister's sharp vampire teeth that are voraciously stuck in flesh (6, 7), thereby stressing in both the close link between pain and pleasure. The final two panels representing Blondasse' and Gros Chachat's bliss show the newly formed couple in profile holding hands. Their mouths are wide open, their tongues are sticking out and touching each other, while a miniature-sized and now human-shaped Belle-Biche is shown from behind in the background of the panel running out of the castle. Her small figure appears underneath the united hands and paws, suggesting that her departure allows Blondasse and Gros Chachat to enjoy undisturbed moments of happiness.

In a parallel move echoing the two panels that alluded to the punk-queen's and Benêt's sexual pleasures, i.e., their sadomasochistic chase through the castle and their breastfeeding baby-daughter, Claveloux adds a final panel following the hand-and paw-holding toddler-feline couple. The last panel shows Blondasse and Gros Chachat sleeping in a cat bed while four babies are crawling on the floor: one with a human head and a feline body, another one with a human head, whiskers, and a feline body, the third and fourth with a cat face and a human body shape. Contrary to Ségur's original, Claveloux's Blondasse did not grow into an educated and virtuous young woman but remains a toddler whose knowledge acquisition is purely sexual. Admittedly, the depiction of Blondasse's and Gros Chachat's sexual endeavors as well as the abolition of all norms have a parodical purpose. Yet, parody is not the only goal in Claveloux's adaptation. In her comics, she questions the concept of a "monolithic 'human' in ways that are entirely amenable to Western imperialist, colonialist, racist, and sexist politics" (Snaza, "Aleatory entanglements," 4). While Nathan Snaza is referring here to a critique against the narrow definition of human in posthumanist philosophies, it also applies to Claveloux's "disidentification" with similar normative definitions. As Snaza explains, politics of subject formation should refrain from creating strict boundaries between species and consider human life as a "humanimal" experience: "Nonhuman animals offer a vast field of behaviors and modes of relation that might offer us a more interesting set of possibilities for interpreting even humanimal identity formation; sexual and erotic proclivities; and forms of social relation, including kinship relations" (Snaza, "Animal Unconscious," 24). By abandoning the narrow concepts of humanist anthropocentrism, Snaza invites us to consider "that we always already are something other than humanism presumes, and our relations, including kin relations, are wider and weirder than we suspect" (25).

In a similar vein, Karen Barad examines the function of monstrosity, i.e., everything going counter normative human appearance, by highlighting its double-edge sword and its political facet:

Monstrosity, like electrical jolts, cuts both ways. It can serve to demonize, dehumanize, and demoralize. It can also be a source of political agency. It can empower and radicalize. (392)

Claveloux's comics radicalizes relationships in her depiction of Blondasse's and Gros Chachat's offspring and of the punk-queen and Benêt's sadomasochistic marriage, resulting in their "monstrous" baby-daughter. As in Snaza and Barad, Claveloux's comics advocates for a different concept of humanness and of subject formation that allows for a diverse understanding not only of existence but also of ways of living. The questioning of boundaries in concepts of humanness, alterity, and monstrosity continues to be examined in twenty-first-century theory and philosophy, as for instance in quantum field theory (QFT). As Barad explains, QFT originated in the 1920s and "combines insights from the classical theory of electromagnetic fields (mid-nineteenth century), special relativity (1905), and quantum mechanics (1920s)" (394). QFT contends that a vacuum contains "virtual particles" that "are not present (and not absent), but they are material" (395). Therefore, "virtuality is the ongoing thought experiment the world performs with itself" (396) and troubles notions of fixed identity, time, being, epistemology, and ontology:

For example, the virtual photon can metamorphose/transition – change its very identity. It can transform into a virtual electron-positron pair, that subsequently annihilate each other and morph back into a single virtual photon before it is reabsorbed by the electron. (399)

Consequently, alterity is an integral part of nature that Barad humorously defines as "polymorphous perversity raised to an infinite power." Most importantly, QFT embraces the monstrosity of indeterminacy and alterity:

According to QFT, perversity and monstrosity lie at the core of being – or rather, it is threaded through it. [...] Even the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude. Each "individual" always already includes all possible intra-actions with "itself" through all possible virtual others, including those (and itself) that are noncontemporaneous with itself. That is, every finite being is always already threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time. Indeterminacy is an un/doing of identity that unsettles the very foundations of non/being. (401)

Barad's scientific explanation of intrinsic alterity and indeterminacy and its ensuing political goal to imagine "dynamically reconfiguring in/stabilities" (401) and "material existences in the thick now of the present" (388), resonates with Claveloux's humorous portrayal of the punk queen, King Benêt's and Blondasse's offspring as well as with Blondasse's metamorphosis from toddler to punk. In her depiction of the

punk queen, her daughter and Blondasse's new identity, Claveloux celebrates their monstrosity and their embrace of otherness that questions traditional binary thinking. In the same vein, Barad hails QFT as a "queer theorist's delight" (400). The relation between Claveloux's queer comics fairytale and QFT might seem less hazardous if we consider the link between marvel and fiction of early modern fairy tales. As Suzanne Magnanini reminds us, "the literary fairy tale was born at a time when marvels were not relegated to fantastic fictions, but swirled around the courts, academies, churches, and public squares of Europe," a time when "early modern Europeans came to articulate more fully scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic theories of wonder" (4). In her essay on QFT, Barad continues to emphasize this connection by referring to the fascination that lightning sparks on fiction and science through "its lively play of in/determinacy, troubling matters of self and other, past and future, life and death" (389), which inspired Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein and eighteenth-century physician Luigi Galvani alike (390). While it is true that Claveloux's comics were written before Snaza and Barad published their works in posthumanist and new materialist philosophy, and that her approach to difference and alterity is not based on philosophy or QFT, her comics abolishes dualist traditions and substitutes a monolithic representation of love- and kinship relations with an innovative exploration of "monstrosity," which creates an interesting parallel with Snaza's and Barad's critical work.

To conclude, I would like to shift the focus from content to form and emphasize Clavleloux's queer rewriting through the analysis of comics structures and contextualize it in the historical and political context of Ah!Nana! where Claveloux's queer fairy tales were published. As mentioned earlier, the questioning of traditions and moral framework is also emphasized by Claveloux's use of the self-reflexive comics medium. The metalepses gives Claveloux's narration an "anarchistic" touch since the characters "liberate" themselves from the "authoritative" control of the narrator. This narrative "freedom" of the characters is in line with their agency: none of their (mis)deeds get punished. This "freedom" also aligns with an essential feature of the comics genre, which is the representation of time as space through "its temporal unfolding in juxtaposed spaces on the page" that the reader can take in as an entire grid while also focusing on individual panels. Therefore, comics "cedes the pace of consumption to the reader and begs rereadings through its spatial form" (Chute 8). It releases "its reader from the strictures of experiencing a work in a controlled time frame" and thereby avoids manipulation "by allowing the reader to be in control of when she looks at what and how long she spends on each frame" (Chute 9). Through its frames, that separate each panel and through the gutter as space in-between, the reader is invited to "project causality in these gaps that exist between the punctual moments of the frames" (Chute 8). The reader constructs meaning through a participative reading mode, which in turn "offers a constant self-reflexive demystification of the project of representation" (Chute 9), since the reader herself is part of the fictional creation of the comics' diegesis.

The content of Claveloux's adaptation, an anarchic world with no set rules or norms besides the search of pleasure, corresponds perfectly well to the medium of the comics that gives the reader more freedom in their way of consuming comics. In addition, its self-reflexiveness invites the reader to question the veracity of (fictional) content be it in words or images, and therefore to examine the underlying meaning of Claveloux's parody. Ségur's well-known text appears like a palimpsest in Claveloux's comics which proposes a humoristic, yet at the same time efficient, revision of gender roles and the representation of heteronormativity. Whereas Ségur's tale teaches its readers (ambivalent) gender norms, Claveloux comics teaches us in an iconoclastic manner how to unlearn these norms.

Claveloux's emphasis on the construction of the narrative by means of the dismissal of an omniscient narrator, the use of metalepses, and the intrinsic self-reflexiveness of comics, allows for a feminist cultural production through the "breaking and blurring of boundaries" and in so doing "problematizes traditionalized notions of real and unreal, of authentic and unauthentic, of authority and lack of authority, and of traditionalized hierarchies associated with the real, the authentic, and the authoritative" (Preston 199). Through her feminist cultural production, Claveloux's comics contributed to Ah!Nana's mission to critically deconstruct sexual objectification and submissive female roles. In volume 1, in which appeared Claveloux's "Histoire de Blondasse, de Belle-Biche et gros Chachat," the all-female editorial of Ah!Nana denounced "les fantasmes masculins déguisés en règle d'or de la presse" (male fantasies disguised as the golden rule in the

media industry, 1) and announced the intellectual and artistic contribution of female artists that would disrupt the male-dominated comics universe and the discriminatory representation of minorities. Moreover, several of the magazine's issues celebrated unconventional female role models, including in volume 1 Marjorie Alessandrini's articles on punk-rock icon Patti Smith (22–23) and the American female punk-band *Runaways* (24) who embody the androgynous charm of the "fille-garçon" (22) opposed to the "suave beauté" (suave beauty, 24) of feminine singer Cher, and who stand for rebellion and dissolutions of norms. Tellingly Marj Marlowe's article "Cinema," preceding Claveloux's comics adaptation of Ségur's fairy tale, criticizes outdated representations of "la féminité avec un grand F" (femininity with a capital F, 4), especially the image of the *femme fatale* who always falls victim to her own fatal charm. Marlowe hails instead Patti Smith as the woman of the future because of her androgyny. Claveloux's comics aligns with Marlowe's and Alessandrini's promotion of new embodiments of womanhood by presenting defiant, rebellious, and ambivalent female characters who choose to not fit the category of Femininity with a capital F.

*Ah!Nana's* upheaval against gender norms and monolithic gender identities was part of a greater cultural and political movement. As Virginie Talet states, the two main influences of the magazine were second wave feminism and the American feminist underground comics (252–255). Free of censorship and mostly self-published, American underground comics of the 1960s and beyond tackled taboo issues, such as violence and sexuality, and "became a bridge between the high experimentalism of literary and visual modernisms and mass-produced American popular culture, mixing stark oppositionality with mainstream cultural appeal, antirealist aesthetics with popular narrative convention" (Chute 14). As Chute points out, "the growth of the underground comix movement was connected to second-wave feminism" (20) and enabled women to express artistically their political views and organize collectives to establish themselves in a male-dominated field. These collectives spread internationally with several feminist American underground comics artists, including Trina Robbins, collaborating with their French counterparts of *Ah!Nana.*<sup>11</sup>

Through its queer content, including Blondasse's and Gros Chachat's relationship, Claveloux's comics epitomizes *Ah!Nana*'s mission as a feminist underground magazine to challenge norms and conventions. Through her parodical approach Claveloux accentuates the ambivalences inherent in Ségur's text that transgress a dualistic structure by imagining a diegesis in which acts of pleasure are not censored. Consequently, her parody does not, or not only, criticize Ségur's worldview, but rather explores possibilities that remain only alluded to, and probably unimagined, in the original. In this sense, Claveloux aligns with José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "disidentification." According to Muñoz, disidentification deals with dominant ideology in that it "neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology." As Muñoz explains, when subjects identify "with an object, person, lifestyle, history, political ideology, religious orientation, and so on," certain "subjects who are outside the purview of dominant public spheres encounter obstacles in enacting identifications" (11). Such a collision breaks the representational contract and "is precisely the moment of negotiation when hybrid, racially predicated, and deviantly gendered identities arrive at representation" (6) by means of disidentification. Claveloux's adaptation "disidentifies" with Ségur's original in that it is not in strict opposition with it, but in that it takes Ségur's ambivalent representation of obedience and selflessness one step further by annihilating their positive aspects. Claveloux's comics replies to the question what would happen if disobedience were the norm, i.e., what would a world without rules and their underlying moral framework look like? What would have happened had Ségur's Bonne-Biche and Beau-Minon kept their animal appearance? The answer seems to lay in the depiction of an anarchical, pleasure-seeking world, in which various boundaries are undone. For instance, good and bad are not opposed anymore, on the contrary, what is bad is at the same time good. In addition, animals and humans are not two distinct species.

Through her imaginative art Claveloux tackled topics, such as sexuality, gender norms, childhood, and maternity, and suggested new ways of interacting and engaging in relationships. The fairy tale was one of

<sup>11</sup> See for example the Trina Robbins' account of her collaboration with *Ah!Nana*. Trina Robbins, "The Two Glorious Years of *Ah! Nana*," 26 September 2011, https://comicsforum.org/2011/09/26/the-two-glorious-years-of-ah-nana-by-trina-robbins.

Claveloux's preferred genres to create alternative modes of living and thinking. In the ensuing issues of *Ah!* Nana, Claveloux lampooned racism, beauty standards, gender identity, and the dream of a happily-everafter, as for instance in her comics adaptations "La connasse et le Prince charmant" (The idiot and Prince charming, vol. 2, 1977, 32-35), "Planche Neige" (Snow Plank vol. 3, 1977, 5-12), and "Le petit légume qui rêvait d'être une panthère" (The little vegetable that dreamed of being a panther, vol. 5, 1977, 33–38). Her art might even be viewed as one of several possible answers to Snaza's question: "What would it mean for us to get to work constructing practices of animanalysis on the axiom that nothing animal is alien to us?" (Animal Unconscious 25).

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