The Scandal of Sources of Henriette-Julie de Murat’s *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*

In the foreword to her *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*, Henriette-Julie de Castelnau de Murat claims the following as she makes the reader aware of two things: “First, that I took the ideas for some of these tales from a past work entitled *The Facetious Nights of Straparola*… The second thing I have to say is that… if I met with any of these ladies [Murat’s contemporary *conteuses*] while treating some of the same subjects, I took no other model than the original” (*Histoires*, Foreword).¹ Despite Murat’s insistence that Straparola is the only “model” for her *Histoires*, at least one of her tales is very different from the Straparola version. Murat’s “The Savage”² (« *Le Sauvage* » in French) is clearly a retelling of Straparola’s “Costanza/Costanzo” tale: Princess Constantine, deprived of an inheritance, masquerades as a man in a foreign country, enters into the service of a king there, and weds him once he discovers that she is a woman. There are, however, far more differences in the plots than there are similarities. Constantine reveals herself as a woman; Costanza is outed as one by the satyr. The satyr himself, a trickster, seems divided between two different characters: the fairy Obligeantine takes his role as the primary force driving the plot, and the eponymous savage takes on the motif of the wild man. Whereas the queen in “Costanza/Costanzo” is burned for adultery, in “The Savage,” Princess Fleurianne is chaste, and her suitor Carabut is killed after he attacks Constantin. “The Savage” and “Costanza/Costanzo” have the same essential beginning and end—the princess passes as a man to discover the fortune fate refused her and enters into the service of a king, whom she weds—but the rest of the tales are quite different. Of course, we expect some

¹ All English translations of Murat are my own with the exception of those from “The Savage,” translated by Allison Stedman in *Marvelous Transformations*, and Stedman’s and Gethner’s translation of *A Trip to the Country*. See also the appendix, which includes my translation of Murat’s foreword to her *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*.

² Other of Murat’s tales could be analyzed for their similarities to and differences from Straparola’s tales as well as for similar themes to those discussed in this essay, but for the present essay limits its scope to “The Savage” in its consideration of Murat’s claim in the foreword of *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*. 
embellishments and complications to be added in Murat’s retelling as she is a writer in her own right, but the changes we see in “The Savage” move beyond this point. Can we therefore take Murat at her word that there is “no other model than” Straparola? On the contrary, three areas of literary history present themselves as candidates of other models for Murat’s changes: other Italian fairy tales, the combined genre of French medieval legend and Breton folk tale, and English drama. These traditions all possess traits that Murat seems to have included in “The Savage.” By only associating herself with Straparola, however, Murat attempts to cast her work as bounded within the domain of the established literary canon of seventeenth-century France in order to avoid criticism for her violation of la bienséance and le bon usage de la femme. La bienséance is the strict set of moral conventions to which both conduct and literature were subjected. Le bon usage de la femme is specifically the ways in which it was proper for women to act and be portrayed. Cross-dressing, whether in reality or in literature, was a dire violation of le bon usage de la femme, and it is herein that “The Savage” particularly violates the rules of la bienséance.³

To understand why she made the deliberate choice to only overtly reference Straparola, we must understand what relatively little is known about Murat’s life. Tradition⁴ holds that Murat was born in 1670 to a family of remote nobility in the city of Brest, a port city on the western coast of Brittany. She is described as having been “born with a good deal of spirit and vivacity but with too much of a penchant for pleasure,”⁵ and it is suggested that her perceived

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³ In contrast with English theater, it was appropriate for women to play their own parts. There was no acceptable form of cross-dressing for men nor women in seventeenth-century France.
⁴ Sylvie Cromer, Auguste-Pierre Ségalen, and Geneviève Patard reject many of the elements of Miorcec de Kerdanet’s “legend.” They propose that Murat was perhaps born in the Limousin region—see Ségalen’s Madame de Murat et le Limousin (1976) and the introduction to Patard’s anthology of Murat’s tales, Contes (2006). Due to attempts during the Revolution to efface traces of aristocratic lineage, we may never be certain of the truth, and we do not know what documents about the nobility in Finistère the Miorcec de Kerdanet family may have preserved in the decades after the Revolution.
⁵ All English translations of Miorcec de Kerdanet are my own.
moral wanderings began at an early age with her romantic liaisons with Breton aristocrats (Miorcèc de Kerdanet 205). At the age of sixteen, Murat left Brittany and was presented at the court at Versailles, where the queen⁶ admired the young lady’s Breton clothing and was curious to meet the girl whose “originality” she had heard so much of, which gained her favor among the court (206). The legend continues that Nicolas, Comte de Murat asked her hand in marriage the same day, but more modern scholarship suggests they were married in 1691 (Cromer 3).

As for facts about their marriage, things become more complicated. Murat’s first publication, *Mémoires de Madame la Comtesse de M*** (1697), was a direct response to anti-feminist literature circulating at the time (Cromer 3). Murat’s *Mémoires*, however, have a complex relationship to her own life. The book, published anonymously as a seemingly autobiographical account, tells of a young lady who, after wedding, becomes disillusioned with her husband. After she receives a visit from a former suitor, her husband becomes jealous and begins to mistreat her. His mistreatment engenders the idea that she must have done something to be thusly treated, and rumors circulate that her husband discovered her and her former suitor alone during the visit. Despite knowing the rumor to be untrue, her husband believes what is being said about her and determines to treat her as though she is guilty of her reported misconduct (*Mémoires* 116-123). Feeling scared and abused, she resolves to take flight with her child during the night, and she flees to an abbey, where she writes to her father and husband but receives only a rebuking response from her father, who insists she return to live with her husband (123-126). She replies to her father, “I would die rather than return to the house of a husband who, having been the first to accuse his wife of licentiousness of which he well knew she was

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⁶ Miorcèc de Kerdanet implies that this queen is Maria-Theresa, the first wife of Louis XIV. However, Gethner and Stedman note that Maria-Theresa died three years earlier than the incident is reported to have taken place (*A Trip to the Country* 2). It may have been one of Louis XIV’s mistresses. The Miorcèc de Kerdanet family would have had better access to Breton records than records treating Murat’s time in the Île-de-France region.
innocent, had thus acquired the right to mistreat her when it would please him” (127). She describes the repercussions of her flight as thus: “My reputation was cruelly attacked: so I knew that of all the decisions that an innocent or guilty woman may make, the worst is to leave her husband’s house” (129-130).

It is difficult to assert to what extent the events Murat recounts in her Mémoires reflect actual events of her life. Miorce de Kerdanet considers them autobiographical “memoirs of her life that she wrote herself” and separate from her fiction, but certain elements of the narrative are without question fictional; Sylvie Cromer maintains that they are “apocryphal” accounts of Murat’s own creation (Miorce de Kerdanet 205; Cromer 3). Perry Gethner and Allison Stedman describe them as “pseudomemoirs” (A Trip to the Country 3). Stedman further says that “it is difficult to tell if these [elements] are personal or if they are simply novelistic tropes” and notes that “in the letters [Murat] wrote to Mlle de Loches while in exile… she doesn't reflect on why she wrote the [Mémoires] or give any clue as to how much of her own life served as an inspiration for them” (Stedman). They are most likely inspired from her own life but embellished with elements of fiction, including a fictional though vraisemblable narrative. Murat was repeatedly reported to be a “debauched woman,” accused of “unruliness, libertinism, debauchery, and blasphemy” (Cromer 3). Such is the description given of how the narrator of the Mémoires was perceived. Subsequent accusations about Murat’s supposed misconduct followed. Accusations of lesbianism became frequent, and in 1698, the year after her Mémoires were published, attempts to have Murat exiled began; Louis XIV eventually exiled her to the Château

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7 All English translations of Cromer are my own.
8 The following is enlightening when considering the validity or lack thereof of attacks that Murat was lesbian: “Nineteenth-century biographers claim that Murat had no children and that the “great Murat family” came to an end with the death of her husband. Sylvie Cromer, however, has found evidence that Murat had two sons” (A Trip to the Country 2).
de Loches (Indre-et-Loire), probably in 1702. The threat of exile was therefore looming over her when she published her *Histoires sublimes* in 1699. While accounts of lesbianism were most likely founded on Murat’s unwillingness to follow women’s accepted roles rather than on solid evidence of any actual homosexuality, Murat did attempt cross-dressing in her attempt to escape the Château de Loches (similar to how the protagonist of the *Mémoires* dresses in commoners’ clothing to escape her husband’s home) and even took a sword in her attempt—compare this to Constantine’s cross-dressing and swordsmanship when fleeing after killing Carabut (*Mémoires* 123; “The Savage” 209).

Needless to say, regardless of however autobiographical her *Mémoires* may or may not have been, Murat’s life was perceived as one full of scandal. This perception was, of course, a potential danger to her ability to have her work published. Only after any censorship they deemed to be in order did the king’s representatives authorize the work to be published “avec privilège du roy,” which obtained for the applicant a temporary monopoly in the publication of a text (Scott 29). Both *Mémoires* and *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques* received this authorization. Given the serious nature of Murat’s misconduct, we can conclude that she would have been more closely scrutinized by the royal censors when she attached her name to her publications as she did with the *Histoires sublimes*. As widely as she was reported to be scandalous and licentious, prudence and care on Murat’s part to closely follow the rules of *la bienséance* in order to obtain the *privilège du roy* were therefore necessary to ensure that she

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9 There has been some discussion as to the year in which Murat was exiled, some even suggesting dates prior to 1699 (the year of the publication of *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*), but the bulk of more modern scholarship suggests 1702, and Cromer specifically presents the first of March 1702 as the date of her exile (3).
10 See also Alfred Boulay de la Meurthe’s *Les Prisonniers du roi à Loches sous Louis XIV* (1910).
11 “With the king’s privilege,” or in other words, his allowance, approval, or permission. This was essentially the seventeenth century’s version of copyright and controlled press combined, France’s first copyright laws not existing until the Revolution.
12 See the image of the title page of *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques* in the appendix.
could publish her work without it being condemned by the royal censors for its—or her—licentiousness. Of all the violations of *le bon usage de la femme*, cross-dressing seems to have been a particularly sensitive matter for the French, which very well may be due to the fact that the execution of Jeanne d’Arc, the most recognizable French heroic figure at the time, had officially been enacted on charges of cross-dressing. Cross-dressing could therefore be construed as offensive to France, offensive to God, and offensive to women, a sign of the worst kind of immorality. When we consider the following potential sources, then, we must be mindful of the ways in which the issue of cross-dressing and associated issues of transformation are treated and consider why Murat may have preferred not to cite these sources as she did the more canonical Straparola.

Written approximately one century before “The Savage,” Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* is similar to the tale in many of the ways in which it differs from “Costanza/Costanso.” Costanza is surprised when her womanhood is made known by the satyr. Indeed, once the satyr has explained his laughter upon reaching the city, saying, “It was, forsooth, at hearing them all shouting, ‘Costanzo! Costanzo!’ while all the time you are Costanza,” Costanza, “who immediately recognized its import, in order to keep him from speaking more, at once stopped the way for him” by asking another question in an attempt to avoid further explanation (Straparola para 14). She fights against the revelation of the truth about her womanhood and tries to keep it hidden. In contrast, Constantine and Rosalind both choose to reveal their womanhood to their husbands-to-be. Indeed, both are presented with their disguise removed for the first time to their

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13 Jeanne’s prosecutors tried to convict her of many charges, particularly blasphemy and witchcraft, but they were unable to do so in both cases. Jeanne’s accounts of her voices, though highly controversial, did not contradict any Catholic doctrine, and the verification of her virginity while she was held prisoner precluded her from condemnation for witchcraft. Her prosecutors therefore resolved to condemn her on the basis that she had worn men’s armor. One can imagine how having one’s national heroine burned at the stake for violating religious law would make that particular issue (here, cross-dressing) an extremely sensitive subject.
future husbands by a supernatural being—Obligeantine the fairy in “The Savage” and the god Hymen in As You Like It—who presides over a joint marriage ceremony in which the heroines and their lovers are the principal couples. A similar coup de théâtre takes place in which the other characters—but not the audience—are surprised by how the marriages play out. In “Costanza/Costanzo,” there is one sole marriage—that of Costanza to the King—while the King’s marriage to the Queen is terminated (as is the queen, for that matter). The emphasis on the king and queen being siblings rather than married in “The Savage” corresponds to the emphasis on familial pairs in As You Like It. Both “The Savage” and As You Like It present positive female relationships: Constantine and Fleurianne, Constantine and Obligeantine, and Rosalind and Celia. The only dominant female relationship in “Costanza/Costanzo,” that of Costanza and the queen, is one of unfaithful lust and resentment.

Overall, “The Savage” seems to start out the same story as “Costanza/Costanzo” with a princess leaving home disguised as a man to seek what fortune refused her, but the story ends in a more similar manner to As You Like It than it does to “Costanza/Costanzo.” A more careful analysis of the two stories further reveals that the instances of transformation in “The Savage” take place at the same moments as those of As You Like It. After the delivery of the backstory, Constantine and Rosalind choose to dress themselves as men. The eponymous savage and Oliver transform into more noble versions of themselves and eventually fall in love with the second lead female character (Princess Fleurianne/Celia). Constantin and Ganymede transform back into Constantine and Rosalind in the final scene to wed the King and Orlando. Finally, just as Constantine’s extended family is transformed at the very end of the play so that her sisters are beautiful and her brothers-in-law gallant, Rosalind’s uncle transforms as he has a change of heart about his behavior towards his older brother. We not only have the same emphasis on
transformation in “The Savage” and As You Like It, we have very similar instances of
transformation at the same times.

Could Murat have drawn inspiration from As You Like It for “The Savage”? The
possibility is disappointingly immaterial given Shakespeare’s reception in France at the time.
The first reference to Shakespeare in French has brought with it a good deal of scholarly debate:
“Shakespeare has a rather pleasant imagination, he thinks naturally, he expresses himself with
finesse; but these pleasant qualities are obscured by the filth he mixes into his comedies”
(Mattauch 288). The date and authorship of this comment have long been debated. Originally,
the latest date believed plausible was 1684, but modern scholarship suggests that the handwritten
note actually came some time after the book in which it is found was printed; Mattauch believes
the note to have been copied from a 1704 journal article (288-289). We see then that Murat
wrote her Histoires sublimes et allégoriques right at the period when Shakespeare was beginning
to be heard of in French literary circles. Given her presence in the circle of Madame Marie-
Catherine d’Aulnoy, could Murat have heard of Shakespeare? Possibly. Could she have been
familiar with his works? This is less probable. The contemporary French comments about
Shakespeare were near universally negative, in large part because he violated not only the
classical unities (which Molière followed) but also la bienséance, particularly le bon usage de la
femme. English theater in general was rejected in France at the time because English boys played
women’s parts. In no play would the French find un pire usage de la femme than in As You Like
It, for Rosalind’s decision to cross-dress as a man to woo Orlando went against every French

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14 Original comment in French: “Shakespear[e] a l’imagination assez belle, il pense naturellement, il s’exprime avec
finesse ; mais ces belles qualités sont obscurcies par les ordures qu’il mêle dans ses comédies.” My translation of
Mattauch.
15 For a more in-depth assessment of the date of the comment in question, see Mattauch’s “À propos du premier
jugement sur Shakespeare en France.”
16 “Le bon usage de la femme” literally translates as “the good ‘use’ or ‘custom’ of woman.” “Un pire usage de la
femme” would be “a worse use of woman.”
sensibility of gender propriety. In the first major translation of Shakespeare’s works into French—which did not come until after Murat—only one of the ten translated pieces of theater was a comedy, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Ward et al). Shakespeare’s comedies were the least popular in France, and of all his plays, then, *As You Like It* was perhaps the least likely to be well-received in France, an example of the most vulgar sort of comedy according to the French mindset.

There is therefore very little probability that Murat had heard of *As You Like It* when she wrote her *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*. In addition, there seems to be no evidence that she spoke English or ever went to England. If she had heard of the play, she may have been drawn to its themes of gender subversion, and she certainly would have been sure not to cite it as an inspiration for her own work, but our present knowledge of Shakespeare’s reception in France does not furnish us with the means to attribute a strong possibility to the idea that *As You Like It* could have been a source for “The Savage.”

Is it possible, then, that Shakespeare’s own sources were an inspiration for Murat? Again, it is doubtful. Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, Shakespeare’s primary source for *As You Like It*, was probably not translated into French. Its primary source was *The Tale of Gamelyn*, a tale once believed to have been written by Chaucer though scholars now reject this claim. *The Tale of Gamelyn* features two sets of brothers (the equivalents of Shakespeare’s two dukes and Orlando and Oliver) but no strong female character corresponding to Rosalind (indeed, even in Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, the main emphasis was not placed on the character of that name). *The Tale of Gamelyn*, then, has little in common with “The Savage.”

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17 Indeed, judging from the travel sequence of “The Savage,” Murat may not have held a very high opinion of England or of the English. Compare the disgusted shock of Constantine and Obliganteine when they arrive at Parliament with their awe and adoration at Louis XIV’s court (“The Savage” 212-214).
While it is unlikely that Murat knew Shakespeare, it is certain that she knew another work besides “Costanza/Costanzo” that likely influenced “The Savage,” for it was in the same *Facetious Nights* of Straparola. The title alone reveals a possible connection between Straparola’s “Guerrino and the Savage Man” and Murat’s “The Savage.” The eponymous savage in Murat’s tale has a very different role from the satyr in “Costanza/Costanzo.” The satyr serves as the means of resolving the plot: he reveals Costanza’s gender to the king and makes it possible for them to wed by exposing the queen’s infidelity. In “The Savage,” this role of progressing the plot and orchestrating the marriages is undertaken by Obligeantine. Why, then, is the tale named “The Savage” if the savage is not a vital element of the plot? Why even have the savage character? He is a representation of hope for the woman who finds herself in a seemingly hopeless arrangement with a man. In some ways, Princess Fleurianne is similar to the narrator of Murat’s *Mémoires*. Both are in danger of being mistreated by a man, the latter by her husband and the former by her suitor Carabut, but thanks to Constantine’s intervention, Fleurianne is “spared… a monster” (“The Savage” 212). The eponymous savage therefore fills a completely different role than the satyr of “Costanza/Costanzo.”

There is, however, some similarity between the savages of “The Savage” and “Guerrino and the Savage Man.” In “Guerrino and the Savage Man,” we see that the savage man coerces young Guerrino into freeing him. By a mix of persuasion and theft, he exerts his influence over the prince. We see a somewhat similar yet different scene with Murat’s savage. He likewise exercises a partially persuasive, partially forceful influence on the king. “Prince, have no fear,” he tells him after surprising him, “I won’t do you any harm as long as you promise to do as I tell you” (215). The savage once again obtains obedience, but this time he is not the captive but the captor. Just as Straparola’s savage man repays his debt of freedom by saving Guerrino’s life and
securing his marriage, Murat’s savage spares the king’s life and weds the princess. There are similarities, and given that we know Murat read Straparola’s *Facetious Nights*, it seems reasonable enough to assert that “Guerrino and the Savage Man” was another source for “The Savage” in addition to “Costanza/Costanzo.”

What of Murat’s France, however? Were there not French texts from which she drew inspiration? One scholar, Sylvie Cromer, points to a medieval French text that she considers a source text for “Costanza/Costanzo.” *Le Roman de Merlin* by Robert de Boron was a late twelfth-century or early thirteenth-century manuscript that has survived to our day only in fragments. Cromer asserts that one of the narratives parallels that of “Costanza/Costanzo”: in place of a king is Julius Caesar, and instead of a satyr with semi-omniscient power, it is Merlin, “half-crazed, half-prophet” who is captured (Cromer 4). *Le Roman de Merlin* places emphasis on Merlin’s abilities to shapeshift to the point that it almost becomes his signature trait. He was also sometimes depicted as a wild man himself, with such descriptions as wearing cow or sheep skin, being “big and tall and black and bristly,” being “cruel and fierce,” and even holding a club (Loomis 130). This aspect of Merlin is frequently overlooked but prominent in some versions of his tales. When considering this Merlin—wild man on the exterior, wise and gentle man on the interior—we can understand how the figure plays into the stories of “Guerrino and the Savage Man” and “The Savage.” Beyond this paradox, however, Merlin can also be considered the embodiment of the principal of transformation. He is free to take on whatever shape or form—whatever aspects—he desires. Given the importance of transformation in “The Savage,” we should consider the significance of the motif in possible sources. Cromer asks, “Does Madame de Murat have a direct knowledge of the story of Merlin?” but she defers the question, immediately responding “Regardless, the only source cited is Straparola” (4). We do not know if
any more of *Le Roman de Merlin* survived to Murat’s day than has to our own, and so tracing whether or not this mostly lost text played an influence in “The Savage” would be a challenge. The little that we do know is that *Le Roman de Merlin* played a large part in influencing later medieval Arthurian legend and that a great amount of emphasis was placed on Merlin’s shapeshifting.

While it is difficult to say that the iteration in Boron’s *Merlin* was a source text for “The Savage” given that it is now lost, another Merlin tale provides a strong possibility as a source text. Merlin was, of course, closely associated with Brittany. Many versions of Merlin’s legend say that his eternal imprisonment by Viviane (which in some tales leads to his death) occurred in Brocéliande forest, which is popularly identified as the Forest of Paimpont, near Rennes. There is even a megalith known as “Merlin’s Tomb” in the forest. One Breton folktale, “Georgic and Merlin,” has at its core similar issues of transformation to “The Savage.” Published for the first time in 1903 by Breton folklorist François Cadic, it has some similarities to “Guerrino and the Savage Man” (Delarue 384). Both “Georgic and Merlin” and “Guerrino and the Savage Man” are considered Aarne-Thompson type 502, “The Wild Man,” which is described as “[t]he prince sets the prisoner free. The latter becomes his servant and helper” (Multilingual Folk Tale Database). “Guerrino and the Savage Man” is generally considered the earliest version of type 502. This would suggest that if either “Guerrino and the Savage Man” or “Georgic and Merlin” was one based upon the other, “Georgic” followed “Guerrino.” However, this conclusion ignores several important points. “Georgic and Merlin” was not written in 1903; this is merely the first time it was published. There is no telling how long the tale had existed before it was collected by Cadic. Given the remarkable perseverance of the Breton culture in the region, a tale from the oral tradition could go back a very long time.
Indeed, several aspects of “Georgic” seem medieval in nature. The figure of Merlin, the symbolic importance of birds, and the victory of the knight over the seven-headed dragon are all elements indicative of the medieval French tradition. Several aspects of the final passage in which Georgic must heal his father-in-law also recall the Arthurian tradition (e.g., his father-in-law becomes a sort of retelling of the Fisher King, the name of the “Yellow Queen” from whom Georgic must acquire bread and wine resembles those of Arthurian texts, the bread and wine itself is reminiscent of texts which link the Holy Grail with the Eucharist). All of these connections suggest that “Georgic and Merlin” may very well be medieval in origin, which would make it a predecessor to and possible source for Straparola’s “Guerrino and the Savage Man” as well as potentially the oldest recorded variant of type 502.

In “Georgic and Merlin,” Georgic’s father, a lord, has a bird captured; curiously, the bird is named Merlin.\(^\text{18}\) Merlin promises to sing Georgic a song if he releases him.\(^\text{19}\) Georgic consents, and Merlin promises to come to his aid when Georgic calls upon him (Delarue 237-238). After Georgic is forced to flee the city for fear of his father’s wrath, Merlin protects him from a thief and then from wolves. A maiden Georgic has met is then to be offered as the annual sacrifice to a seven-headed dragon (the whole affair resembles that of the Minotaur of Crete), and Merlin gives Georgic a horse, a sword, and a cloak. Now “transformed” into a knight, Georgic accompanies the damsel, and the dragon, fearing Georgic, elects to eat the maiden on

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\(^{18}\) In various versions of the tale retold throughout France, the prisoner has the form of a man similar to Straparola’s savage or the previously discussed “wild Merlin.” The use of a bird is distinctive of the Breton version of the tale. Birds are frequently employed in the matièrê de Bretagne, such as in Marie de France’s Le Lai du Laostic. While the implications of this bird-Merlin are potentially quite vast, it does demonstrate a clear, precise point that is useful in our conversation of Murat’s “The Savage.” Merlin is not only a shapeshifter in his tales, but he is what we may call an “intertextual shapeshifter.” His form depends on his story. Here, he is a bird; elsewhere, he is a wild man; elsewhere still, he is a wizened wizard or a half-demonic sorcerer. Merlin shapeshifts not only in texts but across texts, which underlines the essential aspect of transformation as part of his character.

\(^{19}\) Note the difference between Merlin and Straparola’s savage man. Merlin in no way mistreats Georgic and attains freedom by virtue of the beauty of his song.
the morrow instead. The next day, Georgic returns with the maiden, and the dragon again defers. The third day, the dragon gives the same reply, but Georgic refuses to bring the maiden back and slays the dragon (239-242).

Up to this point, the story does not seem to have much to do with “The Savage” other than that a noble child is forced from home and given supernatural aid. The next passage, however, requires our attention. The maiden’s father declares that he who slayed the dragon shall have his daughter’s hand in marriage. A pretender arrives with the dragon’s seven heads as evidence, but the girl recognizes that he is not the knight. The king therefore throws a banquet to find him. Georgic arrives in the same tenue as the first day he met the dragon, “so well disguised that it was impossible to make out his features.” The girl recognizes him as the knight, in part because she had kept a piece of each of his cloaks, but does not get to speak to him. A second banquet is held, and Georgic arrives wearing the cloak of the second day. She tells her father it is he, but Georgic declines to say whether or not he slayed the dragon. She says to herself, “I don’t know… but it seems to me that it’s Georgic.” A third banquet is held, and the maiden is certain that the stranger is indeed both Georgic and the knight who saved her. After his identity is revealed, they wed. (243-244). The rest of the story details how Georgic travelled abroad to obtain items needed to cure the girl’s father of an illness (244-248).

We can break the plot up into essentially five parts. The protagonist (1) is forced to leave home because of a paternal conflict, (2) arrives at a new home under a false identity and meets both new master and future spouse, (3) slays a villain menacing the lady, (4) is unmasked and wed, (5) and travels abroad. This is essentially the same plot as “The Savage.” Constanine (1) is forced to leave home because her father will not wed her according to her status, (2) arrives at...
the King of Sicily’s court, where she meets the King and Princess Fleurianne, (3) slays Carabut, (4) travels abroad with Obligeantine, (5) and returns to the King of Sicily’s court, where she reveals her gender and weds him. The last two segments are reversed in “The Savage,” possibly because the layout of “Georgic and Merlin” makes the travel segment seem like a separate story or because Constantine needs to spend time away from the court after killing Carabut. The two stories, while not having all that much in common at first glance, follow the same pattern.

Furthermore, the motif of transformation is at the center of both tales. Beyond the transformative importance of Merlin as already discussed, Georgic and Constantine both transform themselves by how they dress. Georgic does not cross-dress as Constantine does, but their disguises have the same purpose: both allow them to be portrayed as a chevaleresque figure rather than a shepherd or a woman, allowing them to rise to the rightful status of their birth. Transformation by disguise serves primarily to hide the identity of the protagonist from his or her future spouse. Overt magical transformation is absent in “Georgic and Merlin” with the exception that Georgic’s transformations are made possible by Merlin’s magic, but the use of Merlin the shapeshifter, here as a bird who speaks, brings with it the baggage of the magical transformation which is associated with him. “Mother nature, aided by [Obligeantine’s] powerful magic” was responsible for the transformation of Constantine’s sisters and brothers-in-law, and magic is also responsible for the transformation of the “King of the Loving Islands” to the savage and back again (“The Savage” 218). We therefore have two texts with seemingly different yet similar plots and a shared motif of transformation.

“Georgic and Merlin” therefore seems to be a good contender for a source text for “The Savage” in addition to “Costanza/Costanzo.” Did Murat know the story, however? As previously stated, there is no telling when it first originated, and like with Le Roman de Merlin, there is
simply not a sufficient enough historical record to tell us definitively whether or not Murat knew
the story. We can, however, make a guess. Miorcé de Kerdanet tells us that Murat spoke the
Breton language as well as the fact that she wore a traditional Breton costume when she was
presented at Versailles (206). Given this information, we can safely assume that, despite rural
and regional cultures tending to be preserved primarily by commoners rather than aristocracy,
Murat and her family were fairly anchored in the Breton culture. Miorcé de Kerdanet also
implies that Murat’s literary leanings were prevalent at a young age (206). As prevalent as the
matière de Bretagne was in what we can consider the French literary canon of the time, it is very
possible that Murat was rather familiar with Breton “literature,” most of which was oral. It is
entirely plausible that Murat knew “Georgic and Merlin” even though there is no definitive
proof. Given the subtle similarities in the two stories and the strong possibility that Murat would
know the folktale, “Georgic and Merlin” was likely a source text for “The Savage.”

Why, then, would Murat not reference the tale and only Straparola? There are several
possible answers. It could be that she merely declined to do so as the tale impacted only one in
her collection. Perhaps the influence was a subconscious one. Perhaps she was more concerned
with asserting that her tales were not based on Madame d’Aulnoy’s,21 and so anything besides
their common source was irrelevant. Each of these possible responses leaves us with another
complicated question, however. While we often think of predominant writers of the French fairy
tale vogue at the end of the seventeenth century as the contesuses, Perrault’s Histoires ou contes
du temps passé (the Mother Goose tales) were published in 1697, only two years before Murat’s

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21 It would seem that some critics thought that Murat was plagiarizing Madame d’Aulnoy. For example, the latter’s
“Belle-Belle,” in which three sisters each try to dress as men to go to war in their father’s stead, has sometimes been
compared to “The Savage.” Incidentally, Madame d’Aulnoy seems to be able to overcome the cross-dressing issue
by having the first two sisters, whom we can classify as the “wicked” ones, fail by being recognized by a fairy; that
the virtuous third sister can cross-dress without the tale being criticized for violating le bon usage de la femme is
perhaps due to the fact that she is following the sole acceptable instance of cross-dressing in French cultural history.
Like Jeanne d’Arc, she is an extremely virtuous woman dressing as a man only to go to war.
*Histoires sublimes et allégoriques* and the same year as her *Contes de fées*. Why then does Murat refer in her foreword to *Histoires sublimes* only to the “ladies” who were publishing fairy tales? Cyrille François asserts that Perrault’s *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* “have haunted the fairy-tale genre in France since they were first published in 1697” and that “[i]n France, a ‘fairy-tale language’ corresponding to the expectations of the genre has come to be defined largely by Perrault” (179-180). Perrault’s tales immediately became widely known. How, then, does Murat ignore him? Is she trying to eschew the idea that she has borrowed from her contemporaries? Or is it something more?

We must remember the great factor that separated Murat from many of her peers when it came to publishing: the previously discussed issue of censorship. Murat needed to remain carefully grounded within the bounds of the French literary canon for the sake of literary safety. Anything out of the ordinary could have been a pretense for an attack against her and her work and thus necessitate censorship and risk losing the *privilège du roy*. Though Perrault attempted to emphasize the rural French origins of his tales, he clearly took inspiration from Straparola. In the foreword to the *Histoires sublimes*, Murat suggests that Madame d’Aulnoy and the other *conteuses* took Straparola as their source as well. Murat is attempting to downplay any difference between herself and other tale writers: she presents them as one unit universally drawing on the works of Straparola. Doing so is a form of distancing herself and her scandals from her work, which would have been advantageous to Murat because it was she herself who risked censorship more than her tales. Even if “Georgic and Merlin” was a deliberate source text, citing it may have given way to attacks that Murat had perverted this story by taking a man who disguises himself as a man and transforming it into a story of a woman disguising herself as a man. No, it

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22 Gethner and Stedman say that Murat’s foreword to *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques* was an “explicit defense” of her works, which were often “criticized for moral impropriety” (*A Trip to the Country* 4).
was much safer to only reference Straparola, for despite his own cross-dressing heroine, Straparola’s influence of Perrault and the *conteuses* validated him as a canonically acceptable source despite the rules of *la bienséance* and *le bon usage de la femme*. Murat therefore likely drew on “Georgic and Merlin” in addition to Straparola as a source for “The Savage” but declined to reference the first in an attempt to situate her work more safely in the tradition of the French literary canon to avoid censorship for violating *la bienséance* and *le bon usage de la femme*. She combines “Georgic and Merlin,” both its own instances of Georgic’s transformation as well as Merlin’s intertextual shapeshifting, with the cross-dressing of Straparola’s “Costanza/Costanzo,” and the result is a tale that manages to explore transformation—both shapeshifting and cross-dressing—safely while escaping the censorship and criticism that cross-dressing could bring in seventeenth-century France.

Transformation, therefore, becomes the center of “The Savage.” Murat’s stated purpose for her *Mémoires* was to show that “appearances often deceive” (*A Trip to the Country* 3). This theme relates directly to the issue of transformation, particularly in “The Savage,” where it is manifested by Constantine’s crossdressing and the King of the Loving Islands’s shapeshifting. Murat’s own life knew such transformations and such deceptions. Like Constantine, she was deprived of being perceived as the woman she was. Like the King of the Loving Islands, “because of the rage of an unjust fairy,” Murat was transformed into a “savage” that (was said to have) violated society’s and nature’s laws (“The Savage” 217). Murat is, simultaneously, the

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23 Remember that Murat, in her dedication of the *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*, referred to the women of Paris and the court at Versailles, particularly the *conteuses*, as “modern fairies.” Could this persona of an “unjust fairy” be a reflection of the women who unjustly slandered Murat as the heroine of her *Mémoires* was slandered? Gethner and Stedman note, “Rather than attributing women’s poor reputation to the cruelty of men, the *Mémoires* blame instead ‘a pitiful lack of solidarity’ among women” (3). The “unjust fairy,” the woman who will not aid her fellow women but give credence to harmful rumors, is the source of the problems Murat faces.
protagonist of the work, the Princess Constantine, as well as the eponymous character, “The Savage.” She has both feminine and masculine representations in the story.

Maria Tatar says of fairy tales, “The idea of personal transformation emerges logically from a genre that draws ceaselessly on shape-shifting and metamorphosis” (Tatar 60). She is referring to the “personal transformation” of the tale’s audience, but in Murat’s case, Tatar’s statement is perhaps more true of the author than the reader. A victim of abuse springing from probably unfounded accusations, Murat underwent several transformations during her life, the most significant of which was the transformation from cherished wife to abused, “unfaithful,” and “licentious” wife. Murat desperately wanted to show what she said was the central theme of her Mémoires: “appearances often deceive.” Constantin could make the transformation back to Constantine, but Murat could not make the transformation back to who she was before her reputation was stained. The King of the Loving Islands could make the transformation back from savage monster to human nobility, but Murat could not. She was not given that opportunity by her accusers. There was no fairy magic to help her. Murat could only live her transformation back to her former life through her literature. She made her literature a reflection of her own life, which, perceived as a scandal, required her to remain safely within the bounds of canonically approved literature. She therefore chose to reference Straparola as her only source for her Histoires sublimes et allégoriques to maintain a secure position for her literature despite her violations of la bienséance and le bon usage de la femme, which she incorporated into “The Savage” as a representation of her own struggles in the wake of all the accusations she was faced with before her exile. Fear of censorship and its repercussions prevented Murat from citing the most crucial source for her Histoires sublimes et allégoriques: her own life.
Appendix

Translation of Murat’s Foreword to *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*

I am pleased to advise the reader of two things. First, that I took the ideas for some of these tales from a past work entitled *The Facetious Nights of Straparola*, printed for the sixteenth time in 1615. Tales were apparently quite the vogue in the past century as there were so many printings of this book. The ladies who have up to this point written in this genre have drawn from this same source, at least for the most part. The second thing I have to say is that my tales were composed since last April, and if I met with any of these ladies while treating some of the same subjects, I took no other model than the original, which will be easy to verify by the different routes we took. However mediocre the works one gives to the public may be, one always feels for them a paternal love which obliges to justify their birth, and one would be very upset to see them appear with any error.
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