

Queer(ed) Fairy-Tales of Valor:
Sapphic Love in All-Ages Graphic Narratives

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Abstract

In this thesis, twenty-five selected fairy-tales from the first two *Valor* anthologies, featuring female protagonists, have been analysed using a multi-thematic methodology and an intersectional queer feminist lens. Framed in great part by Sara Ahmed's concepts of "disorientation" and "queer objects," this study foregrounds the Sapphic-Queer elements in these stories. In an effort to understand the narratives, the main themes were divided into three categories: Challenges & Transformation, Family & Community, and Romance & Sexuality. The main goal of this thesis has been to bring a queer feminist academic focus to the study of fairy-tales, in an effort to understand some of the recent graphic narrative trends that are emerging from independent creators/creatixes as a result of a social and cultural desire for stronger and more diverse female archetypes, as well as what José Esteban Muñoz would have called "hopeful queer aesthetics."

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Given the many challenges I faced, this project is far from perfect, but it has a lot of my heart in it. I hope that I have managed to honour you all.

Chapter I: Introduction

For the purpose of this thesis, I have used an intersectional Queer Feminist lens to foreground and analyse the Sapphic-Queer elements in 25 out of the 48 fairy-tales from the first two volumes of the independently published all-ages comic anthologies: *Valor: Swords* (2015, reprinted 2019) and *Valor 2: Wands* (2018), edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. I have chosen these anthologies because all their stories feature diverse and valorous heroines and I have decided to focus on those 25 stories in particular because, to this day, only a few fairy-tales with overt queer stories exist in all-ages or children's literature, much less in anthologies marketed principally toward girls. I was especially curious about the narratives in these collections that are told in comic format, because they are capable of more diverse and complex forms of narrative and emotional expression. I started my study with three main questions: 1. How far do these works diverge from, while still remaining clear examples of, the fairy-tale genre? 2. What elements of Sapphic-Queer love and desire do they bring into narrative and visual focus? 3. What potential dis/empowering do the gendered representations in these stories offer to queer girls and young women? In order to answer these questions I first set out to do a background research on the folk-tale and fairy-tale genres to understand their social-cultural functions and evolution from oral traditions into the written page, and next I

focused on some examples of relevant intersections amongst Fairy-tale Studies, Feminism, Lesbian Feminism, Queer theory, and comic and graphic novels—found under the “II. Literature Review” section. Next, in order to better understand the Sapphic-Queer elements and happenings in the *Valor* fairy-tales I studied them as phenomena and, as such, I read them informed by the work of Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), particularly her concepts of “queer objects” and “disorientations”—the clearest example of these readings I performed can be found in “Sapphic-Queer (Re)Orientations: Exploring a Grey-Area” under the “IV. Analysis” section of this thesis. I realised a Multi-Thematic analysis to, on the one hand, identify and trace the magical and the romantic motifs that appear in the tales—for this particular task, I was partly inspired by how the ATU folk type Index¹ is formed and organised, having the motifs as the smallest recognisable part of folk and fairy-tales. On the other hand, I used the same Multi-Thematic method to categorise 3 key contextual themes to be observed in the narratives, “Challenges & Transformation,” “Family & Community,” and “Romance & Sexuality,” each of them with their respective subsection under “Queer Feminism in the Main Themes.” Each of these subsections contain key readings and examples of the relevance of said contextual themes in several tales, and were created with the intention of providing a wider perspective and appreciation for the study of the

¹ The Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index (abbreviated ATU) organises folk and fairy tales numerically into types—that is, by the combination of their larger themes and motifs—for their study and collection. As explained in the Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales (Haase, 2008, xxi): “Folklorists do not always refer to tales by their individual titles. Some tales told in oral tradition might not even have a fixed title in the same way that a published tale usually would. Instead, folklorists often refer to the tale type to which a certain narrative belongs. Folklorists have developed a system for classifying tale types using a number and name. The original classification system developed by Antti Aarne in 1910 was revised and enlarged by Stith Thompson in 1961. That revised classification was thoroughly overhauled by Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004. Additional tale-type catalogues for specific cultures have been developed, but they usually build on the Aarne-Thompson or the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classifications.” It is a collective work in progress.

narratives (and their elements) in the chosen tales. The readings were done following in a feminist intersectional ideology, partly informed by bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), and partly informed by various concepts in Queer Theory—this is explained in further detail in the subsection “Theory: Queer & Feminism” under “III. Theory and Method.” This thesis has been a long learning journey, I have aimed to locate it right in the core of the intersection amongst Queer Theory, Feminism and Fairy-tale Studies; thus, to honour every discipline's place in and to achieve a fair balance amongst the three of them. In a way, given the lack of studies in this intersectional region, with this project I have attempted to build bridges amongst them and explore their imaginary boundaries. In the same light I have aimed to honour the place these stories and their motifs (even their gendered archetypes) have in our human story; that is, belonging with and to us all, instead of relegating them only to the children's literature realm—while, at the same time, bringing needed attention to honour the importance of this type of literature and to that of queer children and queer childhoods. Contrary to the language of lack and criticism that often characterises studies in Feminism or Queer Theory—particularly those of fairy-tales—, I have purposefully chosen a strength-based focus in order to bring a new perspective, seeking to highlight and comprehend the assets that these tales of wonder offer, as well as to understand the desire that has brought them into creation and, most importantly, how it manifests in these particular collections—especially how it manifests in its Sapphic-Queer form. I have also chosen this approach to bring forth and exalt the pleasure inherent in these stories into the study. In the next subsection, “Significance,” I explain at greater length the academic and cultural relevance that studies, such as this thesis, have.

Significance

The fruitful encounters that can happen at the intersections of this four-way path—queerness, feminism, graphic narratives, and fairy-tales—have barely begun to receive academic attention. The queer gaze is still often absent from the feminist criticism of this fantasy genre (Vanessa Joosen 2011, referenced in Turner et al. 2012, 3). Yet published works—like the *Valor* Anthologies—that touch on all four have been appearing more often in the last decade, addressing a neglected cultural, intellectual and social need. Most of the vast body of feminist critiques of fairy-tales follow Kay Stone’s “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us” (1975) or, more recently, Bronwyn Davies’ “The Fairy Who Wouldn’t Fly: A Story of Subjection and Agency” (2005), where the fairy-tales are analysed with gender and agency at the centre of the discussion. These studies are done by contrasting different versions/retellings of the same tale in different times/spaces. The first is a Freudian-inspired contrast between the Grimms’ tales and those of Walt Disney. The latter compares the “The Fairy Who Wouldn’t Fly,” originally written by Pixie O’Harris (1945), and the retelling by David Harris in 1974, simultaneously highlighting the broader social changes in the decades they were written. Contemporary works like Cristina Bacchilega’s *Fairy Tales Transformed? Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder* (2013) have followed this path, going further in depth into contemporary retellings, adaptations to diverse growing media, and the politics of the tales and their symbols. One of the few academic fairy-tale publications in existence that centres queerness, often accompanied by a feminist perspective, is Kay Turner et al.’s *Transgressive Tales* (2012). In this collection of critical essays, the authors have

successfully found and/or interpreted queerness in a variety of texts, or have queered the female characters of some of the lesser-known Grimm Brothers' tales. Other studies like Erica Gillingham's "Representations of Same-Sex Relationships Between Female Characters in All-Ages Comics" (2018) have, as the title states, looked for Sapphic relationships in all-ages comics, one of which is a fairy-tale-inspired graphic novel: *Princess Princess Ever After* by Katie O'Neill (2016). To date, very little attention has been given to contemporary fairy-tales, particularly those produced by queer artists in graphic narrative formats. Thus, this thesis stands to make a contribution by adding to this sparse literature.

One of the reasons I chose all-ages fairy-tales was because of their potential reach; anyone interested in the fantasy and/or fairy-tale genre—as well as feminism and queerness, in this case—could have access to, and benefit from these works. What this also means is that this is a literary region where age categories mix, and I consider it of great cultural relevance to bring attention to this. Today, the imaginary borders between the cultural territories belonging to childhood and adulthood are often well-defined and heavily policed by traditionally conservative, heteronormative and moralistic authorities who tend to resort to censorious means in order to keep a clear-cut division between the two. Excessive censorship shrinks our perception of reality, our capacity for critical thought, as well as limiting productive dialogue, and diversity of ideas and of modes of *being*; it promotes ignorance, distrust and the proliferation of dogmatic, discriminatory and manipulative discourses. In such an intellectually constrained environment, magical thinking does have the danger to lead towards naïveté, which can cause a vulnerability of ignorance. I agree with Richard Flynn's critique that by over-sanitising texts, we fail both

to provide much needed mature guidance, and limit the child's—and the (young) adult's—access to world-knowledge, which directly and negatively impacts their “development of agency” and self-determination (2008, 117). Some of this censorship is motivated by what might be (by some) considered a well-intended desire to protect younger readers—and their parents—from sexual and/or violent content labelled as “adult/mature,” “harmful,” or “perverse.” However, these efforts can backfire, isolating young readers who might themselves be read as *perverse* for not fitting neatly into the idealised heteronormative, often white, innocent child figure. In her article “The Perversions of Children’s Literature” (2011), Natasha Hurley quotes a passage from Elly Danica’s memoir, *Don’t: A Woman’s Word* (1989), in which Danica describes her struggle when trying to find stories like hers; in this case, children who are or were victims of sexual abuse. In it she describes her desire to understand her situation, and her consequent sense of hopelessness and loneliness when she found herself unable to access this knowledge; she was barred from any wisdom that could have offered the guidance she needed and solace that she was otherwise lacking, all in the name of “protecting” the integrity of her assumed youthful innocence (125-126). This lack of representation may invalidate the life experiences and identities of disempowered queer and other non-normative young readers and may deny them opportunities for insight into their situations. The existence of diverse and empowering collections of stories, such as those in the *Valor* Anthologies, are important step in the right direction to begin filling gaps in literary and visual representation, and to allow for more topics and situations to be thought about and discussed at younger ages.

Nowadays, particularly during the current COVID-19 pandemic, when more time is spent at home, the exponential growth of global access to internet has opened more possibilities for young readers to not only find but create spaces/opportunities for literary identification that were sorely lacking before. Young readers and writers who have access to the internet and come across sites/apps like FanFiction.Net and Wattpad can use them to express themselves, their desires, and fantasies in the form of stories, as well as to read these stories, share them, or even receive feedback from a continuously growing community. Moreover, Wattpad—recently acquired by Naver Corp., from South Korea—has become an empowering tool given that it has forged partnerships with other media publishers/platforms (such as MacMillan, Anvil, Penguin, Sony, Hulu and Syfy), for which it offers the possibility of having its most popular stories printed in book formats, even developed into T.V. series or films. Wattpad has over 90 million monthly users, with the majority of them (90%) being young (millennial or Gen Z), and around 30% being under 18 years old. Like FanFiction.Net, Wattpad used to have a strict no mature content rule on their main site—it had a sister app called “After Dark” for adult stories and audiences until 2018—, and has recently implemented an option to label stories as “mature” in an effort to expand their services and attract an older audience (Perez, 2020). Nonetheless, both sites have allowed and embraced a growing queer presence (in stories and users), as well as stories containing low-key eroticism and themes that would traditionally be considered as “adult” in the printed media; the main reason for this is that the “mature” label in both sites has been used exclusively to describe sexually explicit or extremely violent content. Therefore, allowing a wider creative range of expression (erotic and otherwise) to exist outside that boundary. Both sites’ main language is English, and while Wattpad offers its site/app services in at least 27 more languages, still, only the

English version of the site features an LGBTQ+ section and the great majority of queer stories and tags are currently only available in English. Also, both platforms focus on text-based stories, the presence of user-created graphic narratives in Wattpad has been minimal, regardless of the presence of big comic and graphic novel publishers such as Vertigo since 2015. However, recent collaborations with the site/app Webtoon—or 웹툰, a platform for user-created graphic storytelling, also owned by Naver Corp.—are opening new possibilities for the creation and distribution of online graphic novels and comics. Webtoon does allow queer content, yet it does not feature a Queer or LGBTQ+ dedicated section/genre, while its (also South Korean born) competitor site/app Tapas.io does.

There has been an increase in publications with queer representation and content for young audiences in the recent years, many of them in comic or graphic novel formats, created by independent artists and publishers—such as Oni Press, publisher of Katie O'Neill's award-winning all-ages queer graphic novels, *The Tea Dragon Society* (2017) and *The Tea Dragon Festival* (2019). In their book *Worth a Thousand Words: Using Graphic Novels to Teach Visual and Verbal Literacy* (2019), Meryl Jaffe and Talia Hurwich observe that “graphic novels offer strong examples of language use, vocabulary, and storytelling that benefit all kinds of learners. They foster and reinforce attention, memory, sequencing, and higher-order cognitive skills” (2). Jaffe and Hurwich proceed to remind us that other studies have “demonstrated that people learn more deeply and effectively, and recall more efficiently, from illustrated texts than from text alone” (Levie & Lentz, 1982 paraphrased in 16), that graphic novels and comics have the renowned “ability to motivate students” and other readers (Yang, 2003, quoted in 18) because they

are “more enjoyable and understandable than prose and heavily illustrated novels” (Jennings, Rule, and Zanden, 2014, paraphrased in 18) and "Donna Alverman and Shelley Xu (2003) claim that 'because popular culture texts are part of students' everyday literacies, they hold powerful and personal meanings'" (18). The artistic interplay of narrative and visual art in graphic narratives also allow for more complex and wholistic² forms of creative expression and are apt at addressing gaps in the cultural imagination. As Hillary Chute has pointed out, it is in part because of this that they have traditionally been a medium of expression for grassroots and minority movements, because their “complex visualisations” easily invite into dialogue “tropes of unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility” (2008, quoted in Bauer 2015, 221). It remains important to analyse how these stories are being told and to ask how their queer characters are being represented, especially queers of colour and queer women, because these representations, overall, “still account for a small percentage of the narratives available to younger readers” (Gillingham 2018, 390). Gillingham reminds us that “[W]ith a dearth of literature that portrays non-adult LGBTQ characters for an all-ages audience specifically, it is relevant to consider how reflections of marginalised identities are constructed for the child and young adult reader in the few examples that exist” (392).

All of the arguments stated in this section have added to my motivation and curiosity in realising the present work—the lack of scholarly attention to the intersections

² Wholistic is an alternate spelling of the word “holistic” that seeks to make more emphasis on the “wholeness” in the meaning of the word, which is the purpose of its usage here. After all, holism is "the theory that the parts of any whole cannot exist and cannot be understood except in their relation to the whole," in the same way that a graphic narrative is understood as a story by virtue of all of its parts, or how it encompasses several forms of language and communication (mainly through the visual and textual). For further discussion on the meaning, use, and origins of the word “wholistic” refer to "'Wholistic': A Natural Evolution Of 'Holistic'" Merriam-Webster.com. *Merriam-Webster*, n.d. Web. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/wholistic-word-origin-and-use>).

of feminism, queerness, fairy-tales and graphic novels; shifting critical perspectives from lack-oriented to strength-based; the definition, censorship and sanitisation of what is considered children's and/or young adult's literature; the expansion of the definition and, as a result, the stories that are written for (and sometimes by) younger audiences; issues of representations of gender and sexuality, and the realities that they illustrate and validate or not; the emergence and evolution of complex and wholistic forms of creative expression, such as graphic novels, and how they add to our cultures, among other things. One of the forms knowledge takes is in the continuously evolving ways in which we come to understand ourselves, each other, and the world. As queer subjects, this knowledge and understanding also means being validated as individuals, as well as openly recognised as a legitimate and equal part of societies, and access and creation of such knowledge also means to be allowed the self-determination and freedom to grow into our own shape, diversifying the intangible wealth of what it means to be alive on this Earth. When we are fortunate to taste this freedom from a tender age, the more time/space we may get in our lifetime to exercise our agency in creatively expanding ourselves and our horizons, enriching not only our subjective reality but adding collectively to human wisdom. The stories that we tell create us in return.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Background: Fairy-Tale, Folk-lore

Literary fairy-tales are short stories characterised by the presence of supernatural elements. They contain different kinds of fantastical characters, beings, events, and curious occurrences, and frequently describe a quest or a journey with a happy resolution. They evolved, in large part, from the re/collections, transcriptions, and/or translations of traditional oral folk-tales—the oldest known text (to date) being the Italian double volume *Le Piacevoli Notti* (1551)—translated as “*The Pleasant Nights*” or “*The Facetious Nights*”—and originally collected by Giovanni Francesco Straparola (ca. 1485-1558). Fairy-tales are a relatively new cultural phenomenon compared to the oral tradition from which they originate; a recent study has been able to trace the tale known as “*The Smith and the Devil*,” (ATU 330) via its Indo-European roots, as far back as the Bronze Age (da Silva & Tehrani, 2016). Literary fairy-tales have inherited the four traditional functions of folklore identified by William R. Bascom (1954):

- I. As a pedagogic device, which generationally passes down and reinforces morals and values.
- II. As a form of validation of culture, by justifying its rituals and institutions.
- III. As an exhorter of ethical conformity and social pressure.
- IV. As a provisioner of psychological/spiritual outlet, release, and wish fulfillment. (279-298)

Even when a single function might seem to have more relevance in a particular tale than the others, all four functions may appear simultaneously and often influence one another. As folklorist Lynne McNeill (2013) observes:

[T]he same piece of folklore can serve multiple functions at once. An urban legend can serve as a warning for a whole community or simply as a psychological release for an anxious individual. A political joke can allow an adult to test the leanings of a social gathering, or it can allow a young person to unofficially push against parental ideology. A folk song can serve as a literal commentary on current or historical events, or as a symbolic expression of complex emotion. A customary holiday game or sporting event can provide social release as well as reinforce a group's identity. (31)

Like other folkloric texts, the way fairy-tales affect their audiences depends on their content and context. They carry within them stories with the potential to transmit, teach and propagate ideas, myths, and norms—interwoven with alluring discourses of magic and wonder. In Karen Rowe's words, "[t]he ostensibly innocuous fantasies symbolically portray basic human problems and [their] appropriate social prescriptions" (quoted in Hallett et al. 2009, 344). Their influence on people—as well as people's influence on them—is never neutral. On the one hand, fairy-tales contain the particular values and beliefs of the people and institutions that (re)produce them; they tend to be, like ourselves, contextual: products of the time/space they occupy. On the other hand, we actively influence fairy-tales—as creators/creatixes, interpreters, tellers/singers or as audiences—

when we imbue them with our personal biases (cultures, intentions, desires, wishes, among others), which in turn affect the contexts we exist in. As children, fairy-tales can be a pedagogical gateway as we begin to make sense of our world/s and of ourselves as individuals who are part of larger societies/systems. As adults, fairy-tales can provide us with confirmations, or new suggestions, for the personal and collective cultural ideologies we have already absorbed, or they can invite us to imagine and consider new models of thought—of *being*. Furthermore, at any stage of our lives, fairy-tales may beckon us to travel through oneiric worlds and into inward reflection. This is a practice rich in mindful and therapeutic properties, as the stories within these fantastic tales mirror our own stories and life experiences. Rather than adopting a rationalistic approach and reading fairy-tales literally, which risks dismissing them as nonsense and/or reducing them to their pedagogic and/or entertaining and wish fulfillment characteristics, their persistent popularity invites us to observe their wonders and oddities more intimately. I gladly accept this invitation to critically explore their magical imagery and reflect on what they tell us about our societies, about ourselves as individuals, about our personal and collective desires, and about the way we may make meaning of our realities, among other things.

Fairy-Tales and (their) Media

The shift of many fairy-tales from an oral tradition to the written page changed the ways in which these stories were transmitted and understood. Oral traditions rely on memory, desires/fears, and the skill and wit of the teller/singer; the story changes

whenever it is retold. As such, it is a collective cultural endeavour, with many versions of the same story circulating and changing simultaneously. The written/printed page, by contrast, creates the illusion of—or, at least, attribution to—a single author/creator, and imbues tales with a sense of formality and permanence, enhancing a wish to officialise and correct the stories according to the judgment and biases of the collectors/writers, stripping the stories from a layer of (e)motions provided by a physically present storyteller/singer/performer (Hallett et al. 2009, 15-16). In this sense, printed text could be understood as petrified and unable to grow or change, thwarting an otherwise more organic process in the tales' life. But in truth, the stories find themselves jumping back and forth, shapeshifting (in)between oral and written forms. For this reason, if we are to better understand and study these tales, Hallett et al. suggest that rather than seeing oral folk-tales and written fairy-tales as existing in a binary—or, worse, as a hierarchical illusion of linear progress—they “must be seen as a continuum” in order to not simplify and dismiss the “unlimited number of variations” that exist between the two poles (2009, 17-18). This understanding becomes further complicated when we take into consideration that our technologies and means of communication continue to widen and evolve. As they do, the tales continue to transform and spread in unprecedented ways, allowing for what Cristina Bacchilega calls “The Fairy-Tale Web of Wonder,” or the “intertextual practices in globalised culture,” which is the complex adaptation of fairy-tales in “multivocal and multimedial practices” (2013, 1-7). Graphic novels, comics, and films are some of the newer forms fairy-tales have taken in the recent years. Bacchilega calls to our attention that not every fairy story flows freely in this web, as each is embedded in “geopolitics of inequality” that dis/allow for certain representations, both in their local and global context. The media these stories and their symbols travel through, and how

they travel through them, are affected by layers of cultural and moral filters, as well as the biases and desires of those who have the power to control these media—a power that has reached unparalleled levels with the exponential access to the World Wide Web and globalisation.

Matters of (Feminist) Representation

The most prevalent collections of fairy-tales in western(ised) popular culture—those put together by Charles Perrault in the seventeenth century, and by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen and Andrew Lang in the nineteenth-century—have come to us from a white west-European hetero-patriarchal, romantic worldview, greatly concerned with moral indoctrination, particularly of children and women. This patriarchal treatment of the genre has been further idealised, sanitised and globally disseminated since the 1930s by Walt Disney Pictures' animated and live action films, which has created, at many levels, a homogenising global cultural imaginary of fairy-tales that is overflowing with repetitive and problematic stereotypes—such as, but not limited to, unrealistic heteronormative romantic expectations, the assignation of passive and domestic roles to heroines, the equation of marriage as fulfilment and ultimate goal for girls and women, and lack of representation for people of colour.

Since the 1970s, feminist academics have been concerned with the lack of attention to female writers, as well as with matters of gender representation of girls and women. Jack Zipes, one of the leading scholars in folk and fairy-tales, calls to our attention that

works by women storytellers, writers and collectors—even by most folklorists and fairy-tale scholars to date—continue to be neglected, "despite the great advances made in recent feminist studies that led to the rediscovery of important European women fairy-tale writers from the seventeenth century to the present" (2012, 95). This list includes the woman who gave the genre its name, *contes des fées* (fairy-tales), Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1650/1651-1705), followed by her contemporaries, writers Henriette-Julie de Murat (1668-1716), Charlotte-Rose de Caumont La Force (1654-1724)—who wrote the tale *Persinette*, which the Grimm Brothers later adapted into *Rapunzel*—and Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier (1664-1734), and writers from the Romantic period, like French storyteller Nanette Lévesque (1803-1880)—whose works were collected and transcribed by Victor Smith (1826-1882). Most of these remained unpublished until the 2000s, including the works by Czech writer Božena Němcová (ca. 1820?-1862), British folklorist and translator Rachel Harriette Busk (1831-1907), and Swiss collector Laura Gonzenbach (1842-1878), among others. None of these authors have received half as much of the attention as their male contemporaries, particularly Gonzenbach, Lévesque, Busk, and Němcová, to whom Jack Zipes dedicated "The Tales of Innocent Persecuted Heroines and Their Neglected Female Storytellers and Collectors," the fifth chapter of his book *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* (2012). In this chapter, Zipes recounts briefly the biography of each of these four women, as well as four tales—one for each of them. The common denominator amongst these stories is the character and trope of the Persecuted Heroine who does not neatly fit into the patriarchal ATU 510, "*Cinderella*" or "*Peau d'Asne*" tale type category—modelled after the works of Perrault, the Grimm Brothers and Andersen, among others. Unlike the beautiful innocent Persecuted Heroines in this tale type, characters who "in the hands of male tellers, writers, and collectors, tend to be

depicted as helpless, if not passive [, ...] domestics and breeders, born to serve the interests of men” (80), the heroines in the tales of Gonzenbach, Lévesque, Busk, and Němcová are cunning and resilient, finding resourceful and courageous ways to survive in the face of “rape, starvation, attempted murder, physical and psychological abuse, and incest”—topics that are not readily available in the classical fairy-tale collections (95).

A major scholarly concern has been the observable scarcity of female protagonists in the classic fairy-tale and folktale collections. Kathleen Ragan found that out of 211 tales in the first edition of the Grimm Brothers’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (“Children’s and Household Tales,” 1812) only 40 tales have female protagonists (1998, xxiv). In a subsequent study of randomly chosen 1,601 literary folktales, Ragan found that only 201 (12.5%) have female protagonists (2009, 232). Furthermore, the popularised fairy stories with female protagonists tend to offer rather disempowering depictions of femininity. In “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us” (1975, 2008), Kay Stone described the Grimm Brothers’ heroines as ranging “from mildly abused to severely persecuted” and passive. The few who showed “a bit of spirit... are not usually rewarded by it”, instead some of them are threatened with abandonment—“The Clever Peasant Lass”— or humbled/tamed by paternal figures as in “King Thrusbeard” tale (2008, 15). Walt Disney Pictures took three of the heroine stories in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and transmuted them from the written page into animated feature films that have become emblematic of the studio’s image: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). In them, Walt Disney Pictures caricatured that passivity further, to the point that the characters barely “seem alive... two of them hardly manage to stay awake” (Stone 2008, 16), and amplified a range of problematic stereotypes. For one, the value of these

heroines resides mostly in their physical beauty, kindness, limitless patience, and maidenhood—both in the sense of their youth and assumed virginity—not in their actions, and certainly not by their ability to overcome obstacles. Women and girls were and, are still encouraged to identify with these characters who, on a close look, hardly seem fully human. These heroines “are not allowed any defects, nor are they required to develop, since they are already perfect” (16), they are “waiting for success to fall at their pretty feet” (19). The occupation of this type of Disney heroine is to daydream while performing domestic chores, and they lack any ambition except for waiting to be rescued by an over-idealised *True Love*—usually embodied by a stranger, a male gallant prince—whom she must marry in order to achieve her long-sought *Happily Ever After*, where her story ends. The predominance of this narrative encourages the naturalisation of a heterosexist and unrealistic set of romantic expectations in their audiences, particularly in women and girls (Lieberman 1972), which has been the focus of much of the feminist literary critique of this genre. While it may be true that fairy-tales are not to be taken literally, since their “symbols function resonantly rather than illustratively to suggest multiple meanings rather than to illustrate one aspect of reality” (Tiffin 2002 quoted in Turner et al. 2012, 6), we must still remember that the magnitude of the effects and influence in those who are exposed to them does depend on how close the portrayal of a symbol resonates to one’s lived and/or desired realities. In the 2009 revised version of her article “Feminism and Fairy Tales,” originally published in 1979 in *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Karen Rowe observes that “[a]lthough many readers discount obvious fantasy elements, they may still fall prey to more subtle paradigms through identification with the heroine.” She proceeds to remind us of the transferences of cultural norms from the tales to our everyday life, and that these types of narratives

“perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate” (quoted in Hallett et al. 2009, 342).

A social and psychological need for stronger and more diverse female archetypes and possibilities of representation fuelled the creation of several collections featuring previously neglected stories from around the world. Kathleen Ragan’s anthology *Fearless Girls, Wise Women & Beloved Sisters: Heroines in Folktales from Around the World* (1998) is one of the most complete of these collections in the English language. She carefully picked 103 stories out of the 30,000+ she reviewed. Approximately 90% of the stories she reviewed had male protagonists, which contradicted her studies of folklore in the oral tradition, in which the appearance of heroes and heroines is more even (xxiii)—she makes no mention of gender-neutral protagonists or characters. Ragan recognised and described the importance of the roles of the women and girls, as well the cooperation between them, in each of the 103 stories in her collection, and she offered several perspectives/definitions of strength and femininity, expanding beyond the traditionally patriarchal values that tend to over-emphasise youth, physical beauty and docility. “No matter how many beautifully illustrated Cinderella stories one reads, these do not explore other qualities, such as Joan of Arc’s courage, a mother’s love, or Marie Curie’s intelligent determination,” she notes (xxii). She highlighted the characters’ various virtues by briefly adding her own feminist interpretations at the end of every tale. Through this work she intended to widen the traditional understanding of a heroine—one that is often portrayed as having the traditional characteristics of a hero—by including qualities and actions that could easily be taken for granted for pertaining more into the realm of the mundane rather than the epic; listening to one’s intuition, listening to our

desires and giving in to harmless pleasure, performing ordinary actions that keep communication alive and maintaining a community, and so on. However, having her daughters in mind as one of her main story filter criteria, she excluded those tales where the heroine dies at the end (Ragan 1998, xxvi), and while she makes no mention of it, it is quite possible she may have also excluded stories that contain what she considered other forms of mature content in them—perhaps including gender non-conformity and other forms of queerness.

Another example of feminist (re)search for better representation in existing fairy and folk-tales, was made by Jungian psychoanalyst, poet, and *cantadora* of tales, Clarissa Pinkola Estés, whose bestselling book is named *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (1997). Archetypes are abstract ideals made by a conjunction of evolving concepts, they do not possess a unique form. In *Man and His Symbols* (1967), Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung clarified that "[t]he term 'archetype' is often misunderstood as meaning certain definite mythological images or motifs. But these are nothing more than conscious representations," that is, we would strip the unconscious and the spiritual dimensions of the archetypes if we took them only at face value. He continued: "[t]he archetype is a tendency to form such representations of a motif—representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern" (67). Estés' whole book is an effort to bring into focus and give form to the pattern of the Wild Woman. Thus, Estés conceptualised her Wild Woman from a set of characteristics at the intersection between the ideas of Wilderness and Womanhood—simultaneously drawing a parallel between wolves and women to offer further illustration. Estés explains that her archetype is the instinctive, innate, natural force behind the

“natural psyche” of women (5). A naturalistic idealisation of a matriarchal “She,” in evidence before oppressive patriarchal systems, entwined and identified with the force of nature. She uses images of powerful Maiden, Mother, and Crone Goddesses, sometimes in the abstract and sometimes borrowing from ancient cultures—the Greek Goddess Hekate as an example—in an attempt to encourage her readers to know themselves and find their own form by exploring these images through a deeply spiritual and psychological exercise based on Jung’s active imagination (14). Estés defined her (undefinable) archetype by a metaphor akin to necromancy. She collected fairy and folk stories, as if the stories were the Wild Woman’s scattered and buried bones, then proceeded to “sing over the bones” (1)—that is, she acted as the *cantadora*, the singer, the storyteller—to breathe the life back into them. She carefully assembled them thematically, as if reassembling a body and soul, and proceeded to critically interpret the texts guided by her experience as a “healer-teller” (15) and her vast knowledge in Jungian Theory—all through the lens of what the Wild Woman’s empowered and untamed femininity would feel/live like. She calls her Wild Woman, “the fairy-tale knock at the door of the deep female psyche,” because “(f)airy tales, myths, and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature. The instruction found in story reassures us that the path has not run out, but still leads women deeper, and more deeply still into their own knowing. The tracks we all are following are those of the wild and innate instinctual Self” (5). Through this process, she sought to awaken the “innate” untamed force in any woman who would come in contact with the body of her work, to offer a guide for a new representation—not only of the characters in the stories, but of the people themselves. One that women could draw power from by identifying with, helping expand the definition of their (gender)

roles in this world, beyond the domesticated version handed down to us from the paternal moralistic tradition.

These ground-breaking examples of feminist literary scholarship succeeded in the arduous job of redefining some of the available visions of girls and women in western—and westernised—societies. Yet, as diverse and rich as these stories and their interpretations are, none of them contain obvious Sapphic or queer representations and/or interpretations. In Ragan’s collection, only one of the 103 tales—Parker Fillmore’s 1919 English version of *Lesní Ženka* (“The Wood Maiden”) by Božena Němcová (1845)—(arguably) portrays open desire and ludic pleasure between the girl protagonist and a wood nymph, but it is not even mentioned as a possibility in Ragan’s reading of it. In the case of Estés’ book, she does not entirely constrain her readers to heteronormativity. She keeps referring to one’s lover in mostly gender-neutral terms, or including feminine and masculine pronouns in the same sentence—e.g. “...if he or she be the right lover for you” (35). However, she does differentiate lovers from mates, giving preference to the latter. The ideal mate she imagines for the Wild Woman is one who takes the shape of a man—the handsome, masculine, and compassionate *Manawee* (121-136)—keeping true to a Jungian-inspired heterosexual dichotomy and its alchemic myth of perfect balance and completion in Yin-Yang-like union of Female/Male, Anima/Animus. In this sense, the Wild Woman falls prey to heteronormative and essentialist paradigms—e.g. her intimate likeness to the archetype of Mother Nature, equating women with nature. Still, She can be read as a rather Queer archetype because she often breaks the traditional patriarchal, heteronormative mold of Womanness, by growing assertive, free, strong, raw, and independent, into her own self-determined shape. One could also argue that a woman

reader of this book enters into a platonic Sapphic relationship when coming deeply in contact, desiring and falling in (self-)love with the Wild Woman within, realising that they are “the two women-who-are-one” (125).

Feminist-Queer Revisions and Retellings

It need not be a matter of arduous research work to find the existing fairy-tales and/or to dissect every part of them in order to find fragments that resonate with our (queer)selves. Folk and fairy-tales are also “ideologically variable desire machines” (Bacchilega 1997, 7) and, as such, we may deconstruct them and do as we please with their parts to transform and diversify them, reassemble them to our liking and image, and fuel anew the (e)motion of their gears. In other words, we need not be passive audiences. We can (and often do) negotiate between fantasies and realities, with our desires as currency to trade in any possibilities we may imagine. We may update and reform the tales by changing or inserting elements from our ever-changing perspectives and experiences into them. Stories evolve in this way, “they are recirculated in creative ways by children or even adults; they become the objects of address or rewriting when adults find themselves somehow writing back to texts of their childhood as if to expose the limits of the genre itself” (Hurley 2011, 120). Examples of this are some of the first postmodern, woman-centred reworkings of fairy tales written during the second half of the twentieth century, such as Anne Sexton’s poetry in *Transformations* (1971), Angela Carter’s revisions in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), and later Emma Donoghue’s Sapphic and queer retellings in *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skin* (1999).

In her book *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (1997), Cristina Bacchilega argues that the transformations brought by postmodern authors to the fairy-tale genre are "doubling and double" because they are both "affirmative and questioning," in the sense that they affirm the fairy-tale genre by rekindling the "'magic' or mythopoetic qualities" of the tales of wonder that they rewrite/revision, offering new readings that "generat[e] unexploited or forgotten possibilities from its repetition." Simultaneously, the new perspectives serve as "an ideological test for previous interpretations," thus pushing beyond merely actualising these tales to appeal to a modern adult audience (22). In the case of Anne Sexton's works in *Transformations* (1971), she uses the structure of the fairy-tale as the main driving device, imbuing the work with her characteristic confessional spirit, but veiled in wonderful metaphors (16). This work was unique in Sexton's repertoire. Angela Carter, on the other hand, engaged much more deeply with elements of the fairy-tale—in her writing, with a clearer critique of gender and heteronormative gender relations, or in Bacchilega's and Carter's words: "Carter's own essays mock myth and 'mythic versions of women' as 'consolatory nonsenses,' dealing 'in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances.' In her fictions, Carter consistently engages not only 'the mythic schema of all relations between men and women' but also the imagination that authorises them" (Carter, Angela, *The Sadeian Woman*, 1979 quoted. in 36). While Carter's *Bloody Chamber* possesses these virtues, some readers, like Patricia Duncker, have criticised her for "re-writing the tales within the strait-jacket of their original structures" (quoted in 50), this includes her attachment to heteronormative relations' "rigid sexual patterns [that] teach fear and masochism as tenets of femininity" and that "confirm [their] sado-masochistic arrangements" (50-51).

In contrast, almost three decades after Sexton and two decades after Carter, Donoghue's fairy-tales in *Kissing the Witch* (1999) bring a wonderful light to a gamut of girls' and women's autonomous desires—no longer in non-consensual bondage—and it acts “as [queer] activist responses to [its] authoritative pre-texts” by performing what Cristina Bacchilega calls “the work of relocation” (2013, 51), in which the focus is shifted away from a moralistic masculine narrator to a first-person narrative form that highlights the voice and subjective experience of her non-normative female protagonists. Through this, the tales' nuances address several stereotypes in a “healing” way, by “countering the demonisation” of “deviant” girls and women—witches, step-mothers, skin-changers, same-sex/same-gender desirers, illiterate, inquisitive and curious, etc.—by allowing them to follow their own internal compasses in active resistance to “heteropatriarchal ideologies” (Orme, Jennifer 2010a, quoted in Bacchilega 2013, 52). And while it could be argued that the narratives partly take away from the already existent queerness in some of the classic tales, because desire and sex are not explicit in Donoghue's tales—perhaps because she intended them to be written for, and accessible to, a young audience—both are still “powerfully conjured” as metaphors and/or indirections (52).

Sapphic-Queer Readings

Queer Theory and Fairy-Tale Studies have had, in recent years, rare but fruitful encounters that grant a deeper aperture to existing texts and their semiotics—adding layers of fluidity and complexity to the possibilities of representation and deconstructing the symbols and meanings that are already known. This has often been achieved by

applying a similar method to the one Clarissa Pinkola Estés used to find her Wild Woman archetype in *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1997), that is, by learning to read and interpret codes that are often hidden between lines, in order to bring to life a whole new lens/worldview that allows for a different reality to be conceived. However, what is sought through the queer lens is not one particular concept, but, rather, anything that expands and breaks out of the narrow delimitations of heteronormativity and heterosexism of the texts in question. *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms* (Turner et al. 2012) is one example of the few but fruitful encounters between Fairy-Tale and Queer Studies. *Transgressive Tales* is a collection of thirteen critical, queer readings of tales from the Grimm Brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* ("Children's and Household Tales," 1812 and further editions), as well as a few tales rewritten by contemporary authors. Two of these readings/chapters deal specifically with (possible) Sapphic representations: "Playing with Fire: Transgression as Truth in Grimms' 'Frau Trude'" by Kay Turner (245-274), and "The Lost Sister: Lesbian Eroticism and Female Empowerment in 'Snow White and Rose Red'" by Andrew J. Friedenthal (161-178).

In "Playing with Fire," Turner focuses on the short tale of "Frau Trude" (ATU 334),³ the story of a curious, "very obstinate and wilful" nameless girl who feels strongly drawn towards Frau Trude, an older woman who owns a "marvellous-looking place" with "many weird things inside." The parents of this girl threaten to disown her if she dares come near this "wicked old woman who performs godless acts," but, no matter the cost, she still ventures to meet her. Frau Trude welcomes the girl saying "[f]or you I have long

³ Also known as "*Household of the Witch*" or "*At the Witch's House*." Refer to footnote 1 for an explanation of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index of tale types on page 3.

waited, and longed for you, and now you shall give me light,” and proceeds to turn the girl into a log, which she sets on fire to warm herself and her home (246-247); in Turner’s words: “The tale concerns a witch and a girl and how their passionate relationship comes into being despite staunch prohibition” (245). Thus, Turner analyses the subtle queer codings in this story that, at first glance, seemingly punishes a girl’s autonomy and curiosity, to uncover the possible ways in which her daring attraction is instead rewarded by reciprocity and intergenerational queer wisdom.

In “The Lost Sister,” Friedenthal compares two tales (the Grimms’ version of both as well as in Disney’s version of “Snow White”), “Snow White and Rose Red” (ATU 426)⁴ and “Snow White” (ATU 709), pointing beyond the overt heteronormative elements into the symbology that hides queer dynamics in ATU 426, and carefully considers the disappearance of the character of Rose Red, arguing that “[t]he seeming banishment of Rose Red from public consciousness may reflect centuries-old cultural taboos against both lesbianism and free expression of female sexuality, taboos that her story, and thus her very presence, threatens to unleash” (161-163). In the Grimms’ version of “Snow White and Rose Red,” the two girls live in a cottage with their widowed mother, who named them both after the two rose-trees in front of their home. They are both “happy, busy and cheerful.” Snow White is described as being more gentle and quiet, and preferring to stay home, while Rose Red is wilder, preferring to spend her time exploring and playing outside in nature. The two girls loved each other so much they always held each other’s hands when going out, gathering red berries together or otherwise, and promised to never leave each other’s side. This is endorsed by their

⁴ Also known as “*Two Girls, the Bear, and the Dwarf*.” See above.

mother who would remind them: “What one has she must share with the other.” They lived freely, lovingly, and free of harm. Friedenthal observes how, in great contrast to this, the “Snow White” tale “not only lacks any sexual initiative or affectionate relationship with women, but her own stepmother tries to kill her out of envy for her beauty” (168). These early dynamics are interrupted one evening when a talking black bear knocks on their door, seeking shelter. He befriends them and becomes their “playmate” and describes himself as their “wooer.” Since this figure, despite its bestial form—big, powerful, potentially dangerous but “accepted as well-meaning”—becomes the romantic interest of Snow White, Friedenthal reads this figure as offering “a preternaturally powerful of heteronormative society invading the cottage” (167). He leaves in the mornings and returns every evening to sleep in the girls’ cottage. He eventually leaves for a longer while to guard his treasure from a greedy dwarf. It is only Snow White, the more “traditionally feminine” of the sisters, who is described as missing him when he was gone. For the first time, the girls are exposed to danger, by a less desirable, small, violent, and wrinkled masculine figure. While doing chores for their mother, they encounter three times an increasingly angry and rude dwarf whose beard keeps getting stuck and tangled in places (a fallen tree, a fishing line), and is finally caught by an eagle. Every time the girls help and free him, and every time he proves to be so ungrateful and yells and insults the girls for cutting the end of his beard or accidentally tearing small holes on his clothes. The third time he turns violent and the bear appears from the forest and kills him. This breaks the curse of the bear and he turns (back) into a prince, marrying Snow White, while Rose Red marries some brother of his. They divide the dwarf’s treasure amongst themselves, both couples and the widowed mother. Friedenthal draws the comparison with the passiveness in “Snow White,” where her “resurrection, marriage and

denouement by the masculine bargain between the dwarfs and the prince,” by the prince’s desire instead of the “clearly expressed mutual desire” in “Snow White and Rose Red” (169)

Besides the (im)possibilities offered by closely studying texts in search of queer codings in their characters, narratives, and symbols, it is important to highlight that fairy-tales already align in profound ways with queerness. Both in the old meaning of the word as odd or eccentric—yet alluring—as well as in the newer reclaimed definition as “implicat[ing] lives and theories relating to sexes and sexualities beyond the mainstream and deviating from the [hetero]norm” (Seifert 2008 paraphrased in Turner et al. 2012, 4)—which includes non-binary expressions of gender and desires/fears. Some definitions of queerness go as far as describing it as anything ephemeral, marginal, and/or undefinable that “disavow[s] that which majoritarian culture has decreed as the ‘real’” (Muñoz 1999, quoted in Turner et al. 2012, 14). Indeed, fairy-tales’ tendency towards the unreal, the magical, the wonderful, the paranormal, the uncanny, already sets them apart from what would normally be considered “real” and normative. When we are immersed within the worlds where these stories exist, where *anything* can happen, our horizons expand. In a similar light, Queer Theory yearns for unveiling the endless (im)possibilities—current, imagined, or somewhere in-between—of our gendered and/or genderless selves. It seeks to destabilise and expand the seemingly static definitions/characters of our social/sexual identities, and by doing so, it highlights the spectra and perversions that exist in the liminal spaces where they overlap. As well as to

make us aware of their temporalities and the fluidity of ever-changing existences and evolutions as social subjects.⁵

Sapphic-Queer Graphic Narratives

In the year 1953, a 漫画 (Manga, or Japanese comic or graphic novel) that became internationally renowned was published by 講談社 (Kōdansha, the largest publishing company in Japan). *リボンの騎士* (known in English as “Princess Knight,” later adapted to Anime, or Japanese animated format in the late 1960s), created by 手塚 治虫 (Tezuka, Osamu, often called “The God/Father of Manga”). In this story the protagonist is a gender-bending girl named サファイア (Sapphire)—inspired by the androgynous gender-bending actresses in the iconic Japanese all-female musical troupe 宝塚歌劇団 (Takarazuka Revue)—who is born with two hearts (pink and blue, feminine and masculine). Since the moment of her birth she is socialised as a male prince, in order for her to have a legitimate claim to the throne to her father’s kingdom, Silverland. Thanks to her two hearts, she can easily switch between genders whenever she desires or when the story demands it. The story follows a fairy-tale like structure, culminating in a heterosexual royal marriage. This Manga stands out because of the depictions of

⁵ My own understanding of Queer Theory, based on definitions by Sedgwick 1990, 1993, Goldman 1999, Muñoz 1996, 1999, Doty 2000, Goldberg & Menon 2005, Dinshaw et al. 2007 discussed by Turner & Greenhill 2012, 1-17. Refer to section “III. Theory and Method” of this proposal for further explanation.

switching gender roles that (arguably) contrast with the time/space when it was published, also because it was the first Manga with a female action and androgynous heroine, one that had a consequent great cultural influence in the 少女漫画 (Shōjo Manga) genre—i.e., Manga marketed towards girls and young women. Among other things, *Princess Knight* popularised the trope of a girl/woman living as a boy/man in the Shōjo genre, eventually leading to other influential works like *ベルサイユのばら* (The Rose of Versailles, 1972) by 池田 理代子 (Ikeda, Riyoko)—a queer fantasy set in the French Revolution— and *少女革命ウテナ* (Revolutionary Girl Utena, 1996) by ビーパパス (Be-Papas, a collective of Manga & Anime artists, mainly overseen by さいとうちほ, Saito, Chiho). The latter being an especially powerful and controversial (in its time) coming-of-age story given the layers of queerness in it, such as having a tomboy as a protagonist who expresses, in voice and actions, her desire to become the (female) prince in the story; the narrative centring around the development of a Sapphic relationship between the protagonist and a woman of colour who is held captive as a bride to whoever wins her via sword duels; along with other obvious representations of LGBTQ themes, feminist undertones, as well as its surreal narrative charged with philosophical metaphors and symbolism reminiscent of post-modernism. Moreover, as Heike Bauer points out, it is arguable that “the largest body of comics produced about female same-sex relationships are the famous Japanese *yuri* comics” (221)—the 百合 (Yuri) genre is made up exclusively of Sapphic stories, most of them fictional, either romantic or sexual in nature. Though, it remains crucial to remember that, historically and culturally, gender and sexuality have been constructed

differently in Japan than in the countries where the most famous fairy-tales originate; nonetheless, with the increasing contact of these stories with the Western culture, they continue to bring new perspectives to explore different queer manifestations and with which to question structures of heteronormativity and homonormativity in our shared world.

In the West, independently published graphic narratives, particularly in the shape of comic strips, have been used since the late twentieth century as an important grassroots medium to give voice to identities, desires, communities, (her)stories and other realities of women and people outside of the mainstream norm and/or living in the margins of society. These works stand as subjective testimonies to the lives and times they represent, often functioning as social and cultural critiques to the hegemonic culture. They exist in a wide range of genres, from notoriously radical, or pornographic, fantasies to the humorous, realistic and/or dramatic (Bauer 2015, 219). The first queer-centred comics known to date were printed mostly in North America, starting with some rare strips from the mid-1960s that appeared in parallel with The Gay Liberation movement “and those which appeared in many short-lived gay lifestyle periodicals, pornographic magazines, and newspapers in the 1970s” (Murphy 2003, 3). However, most of these earlier strips depicted almost exclusively male (often white) homoerotic characters and themes. Sapphic/Lesbian works have traditionally adopted an autobiographical character, such as the long standing series *Dykes to Watch out For* (1983-2008) and *Fun Home* (2006) by famous Lesbian comic activist/artist Alison Bechdel, *Pregnant Butch: Nine Long Months Spent in Drag* (2015) by A. K. Summers, さびしすぎてレズ風俗に行きましたレポ

(know in English as “My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness”) by 永田カビ (Nagata, Kabi 2016) and several of the works by North-American Lesbian cartoonists and comic artists like Jennifer Camper, Nicole J. Georges, Sarah Leavitt, Diane DiMassa, Erika Moen, Ariel Schrag, and Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, among others (Bauer 2015, 220).

It is often said that an image is worth a thousand words, and this is precisely the greatest advantage of graphic narratives, whether they are accompanied by text (conversational, descriptive, onomatopoeic, etc.) or not. Hillary Chute observes that, unlike the written word, graphic art generates “complex visualisations” which are particularly appropriate to giving a language to what otherwise would be “tropes of unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility” (quoted in Bauer 2015, 221). Their visual mode of communication allow for an abstract and more intimate expression and sharing of personal feelings, thoughts, desires, memories and other forms of thought, wisdom, and knowledge that transcends the written/spoken word. All are crucial elements of the human experience. They serve not only to the benefit the author as an outlet, but as a window for others to witness another’s worldview. When this medium intersects with the Fairies and their fantastic tales, their narratives can transcend the concepts of our physical, present realities and give way to the different layers of the psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions and illustrations of the human experience, offering a more (w)holistic and *transformative* approach to queer perspectives.

Non-normative all-ages fairy-stories can be the place where the seemingly elusive queer child resides and can recognise themselves. Whether it is as a metaphor of

hindsight—the figure that Kathryn Bond Stockton calls “The Ghostly Gay Child” (2009)—for the queer adult looking for their personal origins as a queer subject, or as a literal queer child finding (language to, at least temporarily, describe and/or read/understand) themselves (Hurley 2011). This is a place where all lines can *truly* be blurred beyond our physical limitations, between the being and the yet-to-be or the perhaps-could-be, the twilight zone between dreams/desires and realities, where we may whimsically push beyond, even further than where more “realistic” narrative approaches can. Unlike previous pedagogic attempts that have resulted in teaching unintended homonormativity—e.g. the 1989 children’s book *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman, as noted by Jennifer Esposito in “We’re Here, We’re Queer, But We’re Just Like Heterosexuals: A Cultural Studies Analysis of Lesbian Themed Children’s Books” (2009)—these fantastic tales contain oneiric teachings that give away enough symbolism to allow the reader to form their subjective interpretations and conclusions, yet remaining forever undefined, full of transformations and “its insubordinations: its sites of dissident or non-conforming children, its failures, its surprising circulations, its appropriations—even its misuses—and especially, to invoke Jacqueline Rose, its impossibilities” (Hurley 2011, 119). Queer all-ages fairy-tales can also stand as the fictional—and yet, real as our flesh and bones—*queerstories* that history has failed to provide us, particularly for children, “since this [queer] history has not taken shape in public ways outside of fiction” (Stockton 2009, 9).

In the present Literature Review section, under “Background: Fairy-Tale, Folklore,” I have discussed the origin of fairy-tales from the oral tradition of folk-tales, as well as the traditional functions of folklore and the evolution of the media in which these

stories are being expressed and transmitted through, and some of the geopolitical and moral constraints of these media. Under "Fairy-Tales and (their) Media," looked at how these evolutions are not linear, but rather a continuum that diversifies the ways in which we communicate and express ourselves. In "Matters of (Feminist) Representation," the discussion focused on issues of gender representation of girls and women in fairy-tales, the lack of representation of female writers, and their important contributions, particularly in developing topics that are absent from what are considered as the classical fairy-tale collections, all written by white European males. In the same subsection, I mentioned some of the research that emerged in order to find more varied folk-tales and fairy-tales featuring heroines—both those who possess the traditional qualities of a hero as well as those who introduce new virtues and assets that are normal underrepresented but are no less important than the epic: every day happenings, community-building, emotions, intuition, spirituality. Under "Feminist-Queer Revisions and Retellings," I briefly discuss some of the key feminist works—such as Anne Sexton's poetry in *Transformations* (1971), Angela Carter's revisions in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), and especially the later Emma Donoghue's Sapphic and queer retellings in *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skin* (1999)—which intentionally retell and revise the stories from the traditional fairy-tale collections to bring about the diversity of representation and expressions of gendered realities and sexual empowerment. While under "Sapphic-Queer Readings," I point to a return to the original collections using a Queer Theory lens, and a growing focus on less-known and/or overlooked tales, and reading between the lines, in "Sapphic-Queer Graphic Narratives" I focused on the emergence of Queer and Sapphic comics and graphic novels, including those that draw on the fairy-tale form. Here, I name some of the most relevant earlier and modern examples of Queer-Sapphic graphic narrative works

from Japan as well as from North America, briefly tracing and putting together parts of our unofficial queerstories in this format and genre. All this has been in an effort to define and set the academic context surrounding the study here present.

Chapter III: Theory and Method

Theory: Queer & Feminism

The general way in which I understand Queer Theory—therefore, the way I have used it throughout my research—is as a branch of critical theory that beacons us towards questioning pre-established heteronormative and newly-established homonormative concepts and values; it invites us to gut hierarchies and dichotomies open to reveal wide spectra in what is otherwise assumed as, and reduced to, clear-cut definitions of reality. It allows for more complexity in the ways we perceive, and make sense, of the world—especially in assumptions that frame our understandings of sex/uality and gender. I drew my understanding based on the multiple ways in which Queer Theory “critiques the subject beyond identity,” in accordance with what is listed by Kay Turner et al. in their introduction to *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms* (2012), which they themselves draw partly from definitions previously given by some leading queer theorists (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, José Esteban Muñoz, Jane Goldman). This list consists of several arenas they consider to be “the most applicable to fairy-tale analysis:”

1. “Queer theory problematises all forms of gender, sex, and sexuality, addressing ‘the political ramifications, the advantages and dangers, of culturally ‘fixed’ categories of sexual identities and the ways in which they may . . . be performed, transgressed and queered’ (Goldman 1999, 525)
2. These moves consequently query what is conventionally seen as ‘the family,’ its historical and social construction and its possibility for transformation into new forms.
3. Queer Theory neither privileges nor denies the power of evidence or proof but also, following Raymond Williams (1977) on ‘structures of feeling,’ relies on categories of knowledge and experience that are felt and intuited, and often expressed in art.
4. Queer Theory questions all forms of dominant social and political relationships in the interest of transforming the world, effecting what José Esteban Muñoz calls ‘queer worldmaking,’ the disidentificatory performance through art and other means of alternative views that ‘disavow that which the majoritarian culture has decreed as ‘the real’ (1999, 196)’
5. Queer Theory accepts what Sedgwick calls the ‘performative aspects of texts, and . . . what are often blandly called their ‘reader relations,’ as sites of definitional creation, violence, and rupture in relation to particular readers, particular institutional circumstances’ (1990, 3)
6. Queer Theory claims, again quoting Sedgwick, ‘that something about *queer* is inextinguishable. Queer is a continuing moment, movement,

motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word ‘queer’ itself means *across*—it comes from the Indo-European root—*twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*. . . . The queer . . . is transitive—multiply transitive. The immemorial current that queer represents is antiseparatist as is it antiassimilationist. Keenly, it is relational, and strange’ (193, xii)” (quoted, 13-14).

These points served as very well defined guidelines for a queer reading of fairy-tale texts, as they clearly laid out the important parallels and overlaps between the study of fairy-tales and queerness. However, since my desire included focusing most of my academic exploration on the women, girls, and Sapphism existing in these graphic narratives—in their characters, stories, and illustrations—that I have chosen for the present project, Queer Theory alone was not enough. I wanted to magnify these specific genders and desire/s, look at their evolving shapes and meaning, in a careful manner. For this reason I chose the intersectional standpoint of **Queer Feminism**—as it exists in the twilight zone in-between a definable desire and identity (Sapphism, Woman/Girl), and a radically fluid and undefinable one. I considered it to be the ideal lens through which simultaneously observe, balance and counterpoise, sex/uality and gender.

As Mimi Marinucci defines it, Queer Feminism is:

the application of queer notions of gender, sex, and sexuality to the subject matter of feminist theory, and the simultaneous application of feminist

notions of gender, sex, and sexuality to the subject matter of Queer Theory. Although the word ‘queer’ is commonly associated with sex and sexuality, Queer Theory is a way of understanding not just sex and sexuality but also gender. Specifically, Queer Theory avoids the binary and hierarchical reasoning usually associated with these concepts. Precisely what it is that constitutes the subject matter of feminism varies from one form of feminism to the next. Despite this diversity, however, almost every form of feminism addresses at least gender and sex, and sometimes sexuality as well. There is thus an implicit connection between Queer Theory and feminist theory, and Queer Feminism makes this connection more explicit. [...] An obvious outcome of uniting queer and feminist theory, then, is that the addition of a queer perspective promises to direct increased attention toward sexuality in the context of feminist theory, while the addition of a feminist perspective promises to direct increased attention to gender in the context of Queer Theory (2010, 105-106).

I considered a queer feminist standpoint to be a creative site where new forms of perceiving, being, and doing can emerge from our imagination and desires, gradually materialising into the physical world. Fairy-tales, a twilight genre, is in itself a space where such imaginations and desires are often more freely expressed in the ethereal and metaphorical safety offered by the abstract and the fantastic. The first two volumes of the trilogy of comic anthologies that I have chosen as a focus for my thesis, fit somewhere in this spectrum. *Valor: Swords* (2015, 2019) and *Valor 2: Wands* (2018), feature re-imagined fairy-tales with female heroines, and some of their stories are explicitly

Sapphic—placing gender at the core of their production and marketing, one directed primarily (but not exclusively) towards girls and young women. I care about the emergence of complex and queer understandings of girlhood and womanhood, as well as their representations and desires. I am curious as to what forms they are taking in the stories we are telling in the present—which might stand as clues for what the future might bring. I am attracted, like Kay Turner et al., to “understanding the diversity of women’s desires and affective attachments, their ways of feeling and knowing” through the “new possibilities” that these characters and their tales open (2012, 21). This was the source of my motivation towards paying attention to and exploring the textual and visual representations of gender and sex/uality in these two comic collections, since they are two of the few examples of queer literature for children and young adults created and published by a collection of individual artists in North America.

Just like Queer Theory, there are multiple forms of Feminist Theory—both of these disciplines shift and adapt to the particular contexts where they are summoned into being, making it impossible to claim a universal meaning for either. In 1984, bell hooks gave us a critical, radical, and wholesome understanding of feminism (as both theory and practice) in her compelling book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. She brought to our attention that “[m]ost people in the United States think of feminism [...] as a movement that aims to make women the social equals of men. This broad definition, popularised by the media and mainstream segments of the movement, raises problematic questions. Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means?” (2015, 18-19). Hooks’ statement remains true to this day, now

on a global scale. While it is true that the search for equality between men and women is one of the tenets of Feminism, it is dangerous to flatten it into this umbrella definition because: 1. It reinforces heteronormativity, conflating sex with gender and ignoring other sexual and gendered (or genderless) realities. 2. It draws a one-dimensional caricature of *all* women as victims and *all* men as oppressors, stacking them into one another. 3. It fails to invite people, women especially, into questioning their own privileges and acquired values. 4. Thereby, it fails to recognise the complex power dynamics that marginalise and oppress people. To even *dream* of changing society and attaining real change equality—and because it is the responsible thing to do with this knowledge—we must critically consider all these dimensions and turn them on their feet. Therefore the version of feminism that I chose is the following:

1. It centres female people, girls, and women as marginalised groups and individuals, and their struggles, in an effort to “end sexist [and gender-based] oppression” while recognising that all female people and “all women do not share a common social status” (hooks 2015, 18-19).
2. Is informed by Queer Theory and recognises that sex (biological) and gender (social, psychological, cultural) are different dimensions of our humanity, and it validates the existence and the struggles of non-binary and trans individuals in an inclusive and respectful manner (Marinucci 2010).
3. It follows in the intersectional tradition (first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989), which means that it recognises the dis/advantages (sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, class, dis/ability, spiritual beliefs,

physical appearance, etc.) that affect individuals and groups in systems of power and oppression (sexism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism, colonialism, racism, etc.) that affect groups and individuals differently in their particular geolocations and contexts.

4. Thus, it perceives that the continuing struggle for social justice and equality is not exclusive to females nor to girls and women, nor is it a competition against other sexes or genders, but a collective and cooperative societal effort “for the eradication of domination and elitism in all human relationships” (Cellestine Ware 1970, quoted in hooks 2015, 20).
5. It is, therefore, inclusive yet not assimilationist. It honours and validates differences between individuals and groups, remaining capable of solidarity in order to counter the culture of fear and polarisation—that we are currently living in—with a culture of love, respect, and solidarity.
6. It is self-critical, that is, it invites us to be self-aware and reflect on our privileges and biases and individuals and groups.

I did not abide by strict rules in considering what constitutes girls and women as gendered subjects, nor did I desire to define/police what a Sapphic subject or sexuality is. For this project, I have purposefully chosen the adjective “Sapphic”—by the spirit of Sappho—to highlight alliances of love and desire between girls, and between women, instead of the word “lesbian”—regardless of my love for the word and its Herstory. My aim in doing so has been to avoid misunderstandings and connections with current radical separatism or political attachments to sexual identities, and in an effort to reinforce the

already existing, yet sometimes forgotten, intimate links between Feminism and Queer Theory. I have used these concepts (girl, woman, Sapphic) as my way of alluding to metaphorical female archetypes that still reside in our minds—abstract, definable, but not quite defined.

Method: Multi-Thematic Analysis + Sara Ahmed’s Disorientation & Queer Objects

As human beings, we are pattern-seeking creatures. Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that relies, and builds on, this organisational and meaning-making skill. For this reason, it does not need to rely on one particular theoretical or epistemological perspective to function (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, 2)—which makes it a method in its own right rather than a methodology, and a quite adaptable/flexible one. As its name states, its aim is to identify relevant themes in a body of data, and consequently to analyse the data through said themes. This thematical lens facilitates the organisation and observation of key features in the data, which allows to see connections, similarities, and differences between them. Braun and Clarke (2006) have identified two different types of thematic analysis. *Semantic*, which is based on the superficial meaning of words and/or text, has parallels to content analysis, and *latent*, which looks in the deeper meaning of the qualitative data in search of “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations—and ideologies—that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (84), which makes it especially well-suited for understanding psychological and social interpretations of data—inviting the generation of

new insights into the analysis. For the purpose of this research, I used the latent variant of thematic analysis, as it fit better the particular metaphorical meanings that I was looking for in the texts and illustrations of the tales. The relevant themes, interwoven with the tales' motifs, at issue in this thesis, are: *Challenges & Transformation*, *Family & Community*, *Romance & Sexuality*. The reason why I have chosen these three particular sets of themes is because I think these are essential to understand the immediate social and interpersonal contexts that these tales illustrate. My aim was to understand the roles they played, as well as the (dis)empowerings they generated, for the heroines and their particular situations. I decided to group these six themes in pairs for practical reasons, as they are closely related to one another and often overlapped.

I have also complemented the queer feminist lens of this method by framing it through Sara Ahmed's work in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), particularly by drawing on her concepts of objects, points, lines, directions, orientations and disorientations as discussed in two of her chapters: "Chapter 2: Sexual Orientation" and "Conclusion: Disorientation and Queer Objects." I have given an orientation to this study by hyphenating the Sapphic and the Queer, favouring and tracing lines of desire to and from female, woman, girl, and other related queer genders that divert from the "well-trodden path" of heteronormativity. As such, they do not follow a straight line, nor do their objects embody single forms. And yet, these lines of desire, being gendered, they do require a certain recognisable form that we perceive as female to be read as "Sapphic" for "[t]he lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this

repetition. (16)” The shapes of these female and queer characters are, nonetheless, constantly transformed, and, given all the fantastic turns and twists, their lifelines are constantly redrawn and redirected. At times, these turns can be quite disorienting, for “[t]he temporality of orientation reminds us that orientations are effects of what we tend toward, where the 'toward' marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present” (20), for nothing is permanent, a sudden change of conditions in the context might occur at any turn of events—rather drastically when the forces of magic are involved, as is the case in fairy-tales—or a change of perspective, and proximity, can alter how the objects within the horizon are perceived.

The fairy-tale anthologies that I have chosen, *Valor: Swords* (2015, 2019) and *Valor 2: Wands* (2018), edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton, are all-ages queer-friendly works in the English language featuring stories with female heroines/protagonists, and showcasing the creative works done by some top digital comic artists, most of them residing in North America. The majority of the stories are re-imagined fairy and folk-tales in comic/graphic novel format; some are original creations, and just as a few of them are written in prose with illustrations. Almost every story is created by someone different, or by a different combination of artists, bringing a great variety of storytelling and representation, both in narrative and graphic style, to the volumes as a whole. I had intended to include the third anthology of this collection, *Valor 3: Cups*, unfortunately, this was impossible. Due to complications arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic that we are currently living in, this volume is still pending. All three projects were funded through Kickstarter pledges and donations, reaching a few thousands of supporters (approx. average of 2,000 per project), and an average of approx.

95,000 US Dollars per project. Each is approximately 200 pages long, with stories ranging from four to fifteen pages. These anthologies were independently printed in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania (USA) by the Fairylogue Press, owned by the series' editors.

Given the magical and wondrous characteristics of each of the 48 stories in these anthologies, *all* of them could easily have been read queerly—in terms of gender, identity, kinship, community, or otherwise. Since the biggest theme amongst them is having a female heroine, every one of them could have offered a feminist reading as well. In theory, all of the stories in these volumes could have been included in this project, in one way or another. However, due to constraints of time and format, I narrowed my choice by giving preference to those more relevant to Sapphic-Queer representations.

Organisation & Selection of Data

For the first step in organisation and selection, I made a numbered list of all the tales in the two anthologies to better identify and keep track of them as follows: Number 1 for the tales in the anthology *Valor: Swords* (2015, 2019), number 2 for the tales in *Valor 2: Wands* (2018); I used decimals to identify their order of appearance, from top to bottom, in their respective indexes.⁶ This served as well as a reference to the total number of tales in each anthology and their page location and count. Next, I located the text-

⁶ The full list of numbered tales appears in Appendix A.

based stories that contained few illustrations and added a “t” after their numbers—they are a total of 9 out of 48 tales.

I kept my definition of Sapphic-Queer love/desire inclusive enough to not overlook less overt/recognisable representations of it, as well as to prevent falling too deep into a reductive approach toward gender and/or sexuality. Inspired in part by Sara Ahmed’s (2006) concepts of orientation and disorientation, I reached a “turning point” that changed the horizon of the analysis in this project—without changing its main aim—and redefined which objects became visible and/or reachable, as well as the metaphorical lines that connect them, because “[d]epending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view” (15). For all of these reasons, I reconsidered and changed my method to a multiple, rather than single-themed analysis. This permitted me to include a wider variety/number of stories without getting lost in the forest of their more particular/individual details, and, thus, zoom-out/widen my scope and reorient my gaze to make it possible to observe all these tales simultaneously. This in turn made it possible for me to more easily discern their smallest recognisable units/parts—their motifs—as well as the patterns/themes that weave these stories together as a fairy-tale genre. Of course, my orienting North-Star for this project remained the Sapphic-Queerness present in these tales, and I still prioritised the graphic narratives over the text-based stories—as they cannot offer much visual data and some unique visual motifs of Sapphic-Queerness that did emerge. Consequently, as a central characteristic, I focused on finding representations of Sapphic-Queer romantic exchanges, development of strong bonds and/or loyal alliances, and other recognisable expressions of love and/or desire between characters who are girls, women and/or genderqueer. In other words, I chose these 25

tales because they offered a better fit with the main focus of this thesis, particularly, based on the previous definition, the recognisably Sapphic-Queer elements within them.

“When we follow specific lines, some things become reachable and others remain or even become out of reach. [...] The direction we take excludes things for us before we even get there.” (Ahmed 2006, 14). I began working backwards and excluding from the analysis the stories where Sapphic-Queer love was absent or quite unrecognisable; these were a total of 4 out of the 9 text-based stories (1.04t, 1.22t, 2.03t & 2.25t) and 17 out of the 39 graphic narratives (1.01, 1.05, 1.06, 1.11, 1.13, 1.14, 1.15, 1.19, 1.20, 1.21, 2.01, 2.02, 2.07, 2.09, 2.10, 2.19 & 2.24). These tales focused instead on individual quests/journeys, on (cis-gender) heterosexual love/desire, and on group/family adventures, or a combination of these. I also excluded (2.14) "Sisters" by Ru Xu, and (2.23) "The Rose" by Mildred Louis, as they are not graphic narratives, nor text-based stories. They are single scenes/illustrations and lack any sequence. Each is one big image taking 2 whole pages (2.23) "The Rose" is the illustration of the poem with the same title by Christina Rossetti—who might have been a Sapphic-Queer subject herself,⁷ the poem is displayed on one page, and on the other is the depiction of a beautiful black woman, walking strong and dignified. On the other hand, (2.14) "Sisters" is textless; it shows two women, one of them possibly white European and the other an Indian woman of colour, sitting closely together. However, they offer no more for the purpose of this analysis.

⁷ For a discussion on this refer to: Roden, Frederick S. "Christina Rossetti: the Female Queer Virgin." *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp 35-58.

From the remaining twenty graphic narratives, six of them (1.07, 1.16, 1.23, 2.04, 2.11 & 2.18) fell into a grey area, where the representations of Sapphic-Queer love were unclear, but other forms of interesting queer alliances between female characters were relevant to their stories. This is further discussed in the next chapter. Two of the text-based stories also fell into this category (1.12t & 2.16t). In the remaining 14 graphic narratives (1.02, 1.03, 1.09, 1.10, 1.18, 2.05, 2.06, 2.12, 2.13, 2.15, 2.17, 2.20, 2.21 & 2.22) Sapphic-Queer love and/or desire is central or relevant to the development and/or resolution of their stories. Three text-based stories (1.08t, 1.17t & 2.08t) also belong in this category. This category became the main focus for my reading in the section titled “Wondrous Dis(Orientations)” in the analysis.

After this first categorisation and selection of 25 fairy-tales (17 Sapphic-Queer & 8 Grey-Area), I proceeded to observe how many of these tales are retellings, which ones are originals, as well as identifying the main fairy-tale narrative motifs in all of them. I found that thirteen of the stories were retellings (8 Sapphic-Queer & 5 Grey-Area) and twelve were originals (9 Sapphic-Queer and 3 Grey-Area). I decided not to base my categorisation of motifs of the present tales on the traditional Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) index of classification of folktales because, on one side, my project deals with contemporary fairy-tales of which half are originals and have departed from the folktale genre; on the other hand, the ATU index, as vast as it is, classifies mainly (if not exclusively) motifs of recorded folktales from Indo-European origin, excluding tales from other oral origins/languages. While a section of the ATU index (the category of “Tales of Magic”) could have provided insights into the folktale traces in the present motifs that I have identified, or their differences across cultures, those are not the aims of this study.

Of course, the present retellings of fairy-tales that originated directly from Indo-European folktales fit almost neatly into their traditional ATU classifications, as such I am mentioning them here to follow this tradition—with the exception of the Scottish folktale/ballad of “Tam Lin,” which is not found in the ATU index. It is possible to take a closer look into the thousands of classifications and mix and match to find the proper ATU equivalents to the motifs that I have identified; however, that would be an entirely different project of its own.

Instead, based on the aims of my project, I began by grouping the selected stories in two sections: Sapphic-Queer & Grey-Area. Then, I subdivided these sections into another two groups: Retellings & Originals—i.e., the groups resulted as Sapphic-Queer Retellings, Sapphic-Queer Originals (added an O to the number that I previously assigned them), Grey-Area Retellings (added GA) and Gray-Area Originals (GAO). Afterwards, I wrote under each story their main fairy-tale narrative motifs—with a particular focus on those that are magical and romantic—in their (approximate) linear order of appearance.

All of these tales contain one or several of the traditional folktale paradigm-making functions, or the triggers of action for the characters to act and the tale to develop, originally identified in *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1968) by Vladimir Propp, summarised from 31 into 8 by Jack Zipes (2007):

1. The protagonist is confronted with an interdiction or prohibition that he or she violates in some way. Often the protagonist commits an error or

seeks to improve his or her social status by embarking on a journey. One way or another the protagonist is commissioned — sent on a mission.

2. Departure or banishment of the protagonist, who is either given a task or assumes a task related to the interdiction and prohibition, or to the desire for improvement and self-transformation. The protagonist is assigned a task, and the task is a sign. That is, his or her character will be marked by the task that is his or her sign.

3. The protagonist then encounters: (a) the villain; (b) a mysterious individual or creature, who gives the protagonist gifts; (c) three different animals or creatures who are helped by the protagonist and promise to repay him or her; or (d) three different animals or creatures who offer gifts to help the protagonist, who is in trouble. The gifts are often magical agents, which bring about miraculous change.

4. The endowed protagonist is tested and moves on to battle and conquer the villain or inimical forces.

5. The peripety or sudden fall in the protagonist's fortunes is generally only a temporary setback. A wonder or miracle is needed to reverse the wheel of fortune. Sometimes a fairy, hermit, wise man or woman, or magically endowed human or animal will intervene to benefit the protagonist.

6. The protagonist makes use of gifts (and this includes the magical agents and cunning) to achieve his or her goal. The result is (a) three battles with the villain; (b) three impossible tasks that are nevertheless made possible; and/or (c) the breaking of a magic spell.

7. The villain is punished or the inimical forces are vanquished.

8. The success of the protagonist usually leads to (a) marriage; (b) the acquisition of money; (c) survival and wisdom; or (d) any combination of the first three (3-4).

These functions do not necessarily appear in these tales in a linear fashion, or exactly as described because a great advantage they offer is that “[t]hey enable us to store, remember, and reproduce the utopian spirit of the tale and to change it to fit our experiences and desires” (4). As a result, they morph according to such experiences and desires of the tellers and retellers—in other words, into fitting the motifs and conveyed messages and their given structures as well.

All of the 25 tales included in this thesis can be categorised as fairy-tales, as all of them are in a short story format, all of them have happy and/or hopeful resolution that enhances the sense of wonder they instil, and all of them have at least one definitive magical core element. The **main magical motifs** that stood out for their narrative function in these stories, based on my own observations, are: Corporeal transformations, a few dead magical loved ones, dragon’s treasure, one false and many true heroines, journeys into magical places, living objects, some killing of monsters, maiden in a tower, magical items, mythical creatures, some quests of knighthood, a few rags to riches, talking with flora/fauna, one pinprick curse, the (transformative) power of love, and witch encounters. The **main romantic motifs** that I observed in these stories, also based on my own observations, are: Meeting as predator and prey, surviving the horrors in the night & holding onto the cursed beloved until dawn, elopement, the power of a kiss, royal weddings, rags to riches, reunion with a missing beloved. The latter set are further

discussed and analysed in the subsection “Romantic Motifs & Motives.” The way through which I came to discern these motifs was when rereading the tales carefully, I would observe their characters, objects, happenings, etc. I would then ask myself general questions at first regarding magic and romantic love. I would ask “what is magical about this tale?” or “what is romantic about this tale?” and I would write the answers down in a list. Then, I would pick each item I wrote down and observe if it appeared in a similar way or form in the other tales—it was not a linear process, I would keep going back and forth, sometimes I would not see a motif’s presence right away in one of the first tales, but then be inspired by its appearance in a later tale, and I would then look backwards to analyse if it existed in any previous tale in the list. I named the motifs by their descriptions, in a similar fashion as the ATU Index has added titles to their particular tale types. The only names that I borrowed from popular fairy-tale culture (yet, not from a particular source) are “rags to riches” and “pinprick curse,” derived from tropes that are common and familiar in several of the tales told in modern times. “Rags to riches” for tales where a character of humble origins, or present low socioeconomic status, suddenly comes into wealth via a fortunate meeting with a magical being or through marriage to someone of a higher status—present in the ATU 510, “*Cinderella*” or “*Peau d’Asne*” tale types—, and “pinprick curse” alluding to stories where the characters pricks one of their fingers by accident or fate and receives a curse—most notably in all the variants of the tale type ATU 410, *Sleeping Beauty*—, or is read as a bad omen—as in the beginning of the Grimm Brothers’ *Schneeweißchen* (Snow White), where the queen pricks her finger and three drops of blood fall on freshly fallen snow, making her wish to give birth to a girl white as snow and with lips red as ruby, an image that also functions as an omen of her death after bearing this wished child.

Chapter IV: Analysis

Wondrous (Dis)Orientations

Sara Ahmed (2006) suggests that disorientations are necessary “starting points” for us to even realise that we are, or were, orientated towards anything at all. Otherwise, we might take our orientations for granted, they may become so familiar and so repetitive—like a “well-trodden path,”—that we forget they are there in the first place. Sometimes, the points of orientation are not ours at all—in the sense that we have not taken conscious ownership of them—we have inherited them due to our particular context, and their effects in our lives could be so normalised that they might not be recognisable to us; we do not even realise *what* we are moving towards or *why*, or even *where* we are standing in the greater context, in the world. As Ahmed writes: “After all, concepts often reveal themselves as things to think 'with' when they fail to be translated into being or action. It is in this mode of disorientation that one might begin to *wonder*” (*emphasis added*, 5-6). In order to think “with” something, we need take it outside from ourselves to re-experience it, next to us, with awareness and intent; we need to step aside and create some distance so that we can begin to forget how familiar it feels to be, so we can observe it with a renewed sight/angle/light. In this sense, both disorientations and wonder manifest as *queer phenomena*, since a condition for them to be experienced is for us to step out of the invisible normalising enthrallment of the seemingly ordinary. In other words, we have a tendency to take for granted the actions, thoughts, and happenings that seem so “normal” to us.

Sara Ahmed asserts that “phenomenology is full of queer moments; as moments of disorientation that Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests involve not only ‘the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us’” (4). Like this, disorientations stand out, and they compel us to step “off line,” queerly, off normalcy. They stop routine and repetition. They can be small, like moving temporarily in the “wrong way,” away from our actual desired direction; or they can be so powerful they completely shake and shatter the metaphorical lines that we intended to follow towards our objects of desire (life goals, ambitions, worldviews, etc.), or even changing the very ground under our feet, tossing and turning the objects around us, changing our perceived existence and the perception we had of the world. Sara Ahmed, continuing to quote Maurice Merleau-Ponty, tells us that “these moments are overcome, as bodies become reoriented” (4). Of course, this reorientation can mean many different things and manifest in many different ways; it could be that we find a new anchor, a new centre of gravity, a new direction, or it can mean adaptation to the new configurations of space, time, and objects around us. However, we may also reorient within or towards the disorientation, I agree with Sara Ahmed’s suggestion that “if we stay with such moments then we might achieve a different orientation toward them; such moments may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness. We might even find joy and excitement in the horror.” (4) In other words, these disorientations are not merely confusing interruptions but orientations in their own right, (re)orientations towards less walked paths, invitations to new horizons, viewpoints, lines, even opportunities for new forms of being, ways of living—that is, for us to recognise, or even draw, new “lifelines,” as Sara Ahmed would call them.

In this light, I read fairy-tales as artistic manifestations of queer phenomena; they are marvellous windows into such moments of (dis/re)orientation. Magic makes fairy-tales into fertile grounds for the emergence of moments of (dis)orientation and wonder. They invite us into a different point of view where logic turns surreal, where miracles are every day happenings. Their horrors become so much more pleasurable because we experience them in safety; they are trapped in reflections on slanted smoky mirrors⁸—similar and simultaneously so unlike our physical reality—from which they cannot escape and materialise. Their marvels seduce us into wilfully remaining in those disorienting moments, moments in which such horrors and marvels coexist, and, in remaining, we reorient ourselves into experiencing and exploring them further, for as long as they last—an hour or a lifetime, if their seeds of thought and/or desire take root in our minds/hearts.

If we accept such charming invitations, where does the magic of fairy-tales lead us? Ultimately, fairy-tales promise us pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction. They guide us towards that last paragraph, illustration or panel in which the resolution of the story is honeyed with the alluring semblance of a wholesome forever or “Happily Ever After.” Spicing it further through turns and twists of (im)possible challenges taken by interesting and/or relatable protagonists. After triumphing and successfully overcoming their own disorientations, these protagonists are rewarded with desired/desirable treasures—for the

⁸ Slanted mirrors, much like the analogy of “the queer slants,” derived from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, that Sara Ahmed (2006) reads and discusses in her second chapter, *Sexual Orientation*, in which she observes how such slants are perceived as “oblique” against the “straight line,” but that are necessary points of comparison for the straight line to be recognised and appear as such in the first place.

characters in the stories as well as for the readers. These characters obtain—more often than not through exercising/strengthening their personal virtues, after all, these are tales of *valour*—what seems to be an endless and well-deserved/just supply of stability, peace, community, freedom, wealth, power, status, justice, retribution, health, family, wisdom, or love—not all at once, it could be only one or a combination of a few or several of them. It is the latter, love, that is my focus; love not merely as a reward, but Sapphic-Queer love as a key form of love/desire—and (re)orienting device—in these tales of wonder.

Sapphic-Queer (Re)Orientations

It is interesting to note that in landscape architecture they use the term ‘*desire lines*’ to describe unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths that they are supposed to follow. (Ahmed, 2006, 19-20, *emphasis added*)

Exploring a Grey-Area

In this section I discuss a quite interesting example of a possible yet not clear-cut apparition of the Sapphic-Queer amongst the tales that I categorised as belonging to the “Grey-Area,” before moving onto other more overt and focused manifestations of this form of love and desire. The Sapphic-Queer apparitions in the Grey-Area fall in the margins, or altogether outside, the realm of romance. Any recognisable Sapphic-Queer elements are drawn into the background, or out of sight—in moments we do not have

access to because they exist in silences/gaps and/or coded in symbols. The female and/or queer alliances that are illustrated in the tales in this category are nonetheless relevant to their narratives, and, certainly, interesting angles of love or passion to observe in the context of this work. Following Sara Ahmed's concepts described above, paying attention to the blurry objects in the periphery of focus, objects that are not "self-evident" but "relegated to the background," or even those objects that remain unseen "behind the philosopher's back," might be, in itself, considered an act of queer phenomenology (2006, Chapter 1: Orientation Toward Objects, 25-64).

In (1.07GA) "Crane Wife" by Alex Singer and Jayd Ait-Kaci (*Valor: Swords* 2015, 85-100), a beautiful young woman, who is really a crane, Lady Mitsuru,⁹ comes to join a married couple's household: The Yamagata family, consisting of husband and wife. She and the Master of the household had met when both were lost and bleeding profusely, during a terrible blizzard—which might stand as an analogy for a terribly difficult time—and they comforted and helped each other find their way home. Before they parted ways, they made a promise to do one another a great favour when their fortunes fared better. It had been a year, and Lady Mitsuru returned to fulfill her promise. Both husband and wife gladly welcomed her for many years as part of their lives. She gifted the couple a katana sword, one that gave them the means to achieve great power, wealth, and status; a gift that particularly suited the Master who Lady Mitsuru describes as "ruthless and ambitious." She also produced a son with the husband; at this point, Lady Yamagata, the

⁹ Mitsuru is most commonly a masculine name, sometimes written with the kanji 充, which stands for "full" or "growing." However, depending on the kanji used, it could be a play of words to mean 美鶴 "beautiful crane," the addition of the 美 (beauty) kanji makes the name culturally feminine, even though the pronunciation remains the same. The kanji are not revealed in the story.

wife, became inflamed with jealousy, and sent the crane woman away from the household, and away from her son. For thirteen years, Lady Mitsuru received a small fraction of the wealth the family accumulated, and thousands of perfectly folded origami cranes,¹⁰ but they stopped coming after the husband died. Lady Mitsuru returned to the Yamagata household to take back what she was owed, what she called “the first of her paper cranes,” her son. Lady Yamagata, unwilling to comply, kept Lady Mitsuru waiting in the household. Then, asked an androgynous female detective (Fig. 2) to interview Lady Mitsuru about the purpose of her return, and to try to unveil her true nature. Lady Yamagata suspects Lady Mitsuru is not just a woman but something else, a demon or a ghoul. The nameless female detective—a queer folktale detective, quite used to the existence of spirits and their “weird” desires—is the narrator of the story, and it is through her analytical gaze that we come to know of the accounts of both women. After the detective is done interviewing Lady Mitsuru, and after an unpleasant exchange with Lady Yamagata, she leaves, and we witness a scene that she does not: the bloody details of the resolution of the relationship between Lady Mitsuru and Lady Yamagata. Lady

¹⁰ Origami cranes are most known as 折鶴 orizuru, or paper crane, often gifted to others as a blessing and a sign of gratitude. A popular Japanese legend, 千羽鶴 senbazuru, or thousand cranes, tells that those who carefully fold a thousand origami cranes may have a wish heard and granted by the Gods. This legend began reaching global scale in recent times with the story of Sadako Sasaki (佐々木 禎子), a young girl who was one of the victims (known as 被爆者 Hibakusha) of the atomic bombings in 1945. She was folding orizuru hoping to become healthy. Accounts by her family say that she not only reached but surpassed her goal of a thousand orizuru, filling this symbol with hope and resilience, even after her premature death. In 2012, Sue DiCicco, a former Disney animator and author and illustrator of children’s books, founded The Peace Crane Project inspired by Sadako’s story and in collaboration with Masahiro Sasaki (Sadako’s older brother, who was also exposed to the bombings but survived), to honour Sadako and raise awareness worldwide amongst children, and their school teachers, against war; as well as to promote global exchanges and connections through the art of 折鶴 orizuru and 千羽鶴 senbazuru. <https://sadakosasaki.com/> and <https://peacecraneproject.org/>

Mitsuru kills Lady Yamagata after she threatens to kill Lady Mitsuru's son with the gifted katana, a last unforgivable transgression of dishonour and conceit.

Sometime later, when reading a newspaper, the detective learns that Lady Yamagata died and a new Master had been declared: Lady Mitsuru's son, Izuru Yamagata. It is in this moment that the realisation hits her; the true Master of the household had been the wife all along and not the husband, that it had been Lady Yamagata and Lady Mitsuru who had found and comforted each other in the blizzard (Fig. 3). The relationship of these two ladies started in bloody communion, and ended in a bloody passionate exchange. Without making the subtle connections through elements in the background of the illustrations and through the analysis offered by the androgynous detective, it is quite easy to completely miss the queer moments. The way this story is told relies on the reader's assumption of a preconceived heteronormative "standard case," a "straight line" in which the presence of this young beautiful woman in a couple's—wife and husband—childless household will almost "unavoidably" start where it ends: in a romantic affair with the husband—especially because the original folktale variant with the same title creates a heterosexual coupling between the wounded crane woman and the man who saves her. Of course, this orientation is intentional in order to make the twist at the end, to disorient the reader during the last exchange of the two women before reorienting them when the female detective realises what truly went on between the women; a blurry image in the background gives her thoughts and connections away (Fig. 3). She realises that the case was more complex than she originally thought, even the androgynous detective held the preconceptions that led her to judge this as a "standard case" at first. This realisation is not a simple twist in the tale, it is confusing, the elements

that direct us towards the truth of the “case” are scattered in the background, symbolic, and even hidden, out of our sight—abstractions and silences, rather than secrets, from both of the women’s experiences. If we reread the story and zoom closer into the elements in the background, it is Lady Yamagata who is seen on several panels as the main wielder of the katana sword (e.g., Fig. 1), signalling her as the true recipient of the deadly gift, or, at least, as the main user. Likewise, before the murder scene—cleverly censored and signalled by a whole-page panel illustration of a 障子 shōji door splattered with blood—if we look closely at the brief conversation between the women, we come to understand that Lady Yamagata mistakenly thought that the favour/gift that Lady Mitsuru had given her, besides the katana sword, was the son she produced with the husband. The story leaves clues that the confusion/assumption could have arisen because the Master, who now we know was Lady Yamagata, had asked for a life, “one wished for most dearly” (91), as her favour from Lady Mitsuru. She failed to realise that the life that Lady Mitsuru had given her was her own. The tale does not specify what this means exactly, yet it points at her life after the storm. It could be the mere fact that she survived the blizzard, or perhaps how Lady Mitsuru bestowed her a new and powerful lifeline altogether when she gave her the means to achieve her ambitions and give prosperity to her household. A lifeline drawn by the edge of the sword, set in motion by an ambitious and dangerous desire, cutting short other lifelines that crossed its path, cruelly stopping their movement.

Another fatal miscalculation on Lady Yamagata’s side is that, even though she knew Lady Mitsuru was much more than she seemed, she felt she had power over her; so much so that she felt entitled to keep her son (more in the sense of possession than

motherhood) and even to threaten his life. She knew Lady Mitsuru wanted her son back, and Lady Mitsuru knew that Lady Yamagata would be unwilling to let him go, to let her have him back, alive. It may be because of how they met, as predator and prey,¹¹ which Lady Mitsuru cites as the reason for their departure after the storm: “The hunter’s hands were warm. They held me, desperate for life. When the storm passed, we both went our separate ways. We were predator and prey, after all” (88) Perhaps Lady Yamagata kept the impression that she would always be the hunter, but objects sometimes can exchange places while still connected by the same line.

“My price was for *your* life” (97), are the last words Lady Mitsuru says before she takes Lady Yamagata’s life. Therefore, in a way, they both desired the same thing from each other, life, life force, in one way or another—lifelines that offered a reorientation in the shape of power, a new generation, a lifestyle. It remains unclear why Lady Mitsuru waits until this moment, so many years after, to take Lady Yamagata’s life. The answer to this exists in something not shown and unspoken, a silence or possibly another hidden symbol—cultural or otherwise. In any case, the detective did not need to witness their conversation, nor the murder/retribution, to uncover the queerness that, very likely, no one else could ever see—even, very likely, many readers. As an analytical queer agent, she is capable of detecting simultaneous angles in seemingly “straight lines” of apparent “standard cases.”

¹¹ "Meeting as predator and prey" is a motif I found to be often related to romantic exchanges in these fairy-tales. For further discussion refer to next section titled “Romantic Motives & Motifs.”



(Fig. 1) Lady Yamagata with katana, background. (Fig. 2) Female detective.



(Fig. 3) Moment of realisation.

Romantic Motives & Motifs

Romantic motifs are orientation devices in these fairy-tales; they set the mood and offer pivotal points in a narrative, leading us towards the feeling, understanding, and representation of one recognisable aspect, or one angle, of the Sapphic-Queer phenomena in these tales of wonder. Many of the stories here mentioned are further discussed in the next section, as many contain multiple themes studies.

Meeting as predator and prey appears as a romantic motif in eight tales, three of which fall into the “Grey-Area” category. In the tale "Crane Wife," previously discussed, this romantic motif appears in the shape of a hunter and a crane-woman. In the text-based story (1.12tGAO) "Eggchild," by Ash Barnes and Elena "Yamino" Barbarich (*Valor: Swords*, 2015, 151-159), the young girl protagonist, Zahra, meets a female Gryphon, or skylion, that could have ripped her apart and eaten her mercilessly in her nest, more out of rage than need, since the miserable girl’s mother had stolen and murdered her two precious eggs; Zahra came also with her mother’s torn weapon, a sling, hoping to find this Gryphon, the monster that killed her mother. Retribution is what brings the Gryphon and Zahra together. In realising that they need each other, that they could love/support each other in their respective mourning—a childless mother, a motherless child—they can begin to fill each other’s emptiness. Thus, the predator turns into a guardian, her passionate rage transformed into deep compassion and love. “Please, don’t leave me” [...] “No, little Zahra, little chick. No, I won’t leave you. [...] My chick” (159); the Gryphon takes Zahra away from the desert that was her existence, somewhere else where the grass is greener, and vital resources abound. In (1.16GA) "Please" by August and Cory Brown (*Valor: Swords*, 2015, 189-203), the predator and prey meeting occurs between a cursed prince in the shape of a giant bear and two sisters who share a life together, Rose Red and Snow White.¹² However, the bear does not become the romantic object for the girls, but a dear friend they help save.

¹² For a queer reading of the original tale refer to Friedenthal, Andrew J. “The Lost Sister: Lesbian Eroticism and Female Empowerment in ‘Snow White and Rose Red,’” *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*, edited by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill. Wayne State University Press, 2012. pp. 161-178.

In the Sapphic-Queer category, this motif appears in 5 tales. In “Bride of the Rose Beast,” a Lindworm desires a bride to marry and has already devoured two. In the text-based (1.17t) "All Furs," by Joanne Webster and Emily Hann (*Valor: Swords*, 2015, 204-215), Princess Avery meets Samantha as All Furs while hunting in the forest, confusing her with a strange beast at first, and almost killing her by mistake. Samantha was a princess from a neighbouring kingdom; she fled the incestuous intentions of her father and hid herself in this strange and unrecognisable shape for safety, changing her identity into All Furs.¹³ This disguise, made with the skins of many animals, gives her an advantage in her rather disadvantaged position (compared to Princess Avery), she conceals her identity and her beauty, and this way she can get to gauge the intentions and motives of others, especially those of Princess Avery, for whom she develops romantic feelings. Samantha does so by drawing a contrast between her two identities: she appears as a mysterious beautiful princess on three different occasions, and dances with Avery, taking up all her attention all three times. Then, each time she turns back into All Furs, hoping that Avery will eventually recognise her and love her for who she truly is, somewhere in-between both identities. In “Swan Lake,” Princess Friedine is also hunting in the forest, the great swan she is after turns out to be Swan Queen Odette, and they fall in love when she transforms into her beautiful human form. In "The Dragon Princess," it is the princess who is the dragon, the predator of the knight; she seeks to add her to her endless collection of possessions, the good she takes from the world for herself. In (2.060) "The Laughing Queen" by Gisele Weave (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 63-75), The

¹³ In the original story written by the Brothers Grimm, “Allerleirauh,” she conceals her gender as well, being referred to with the German third gender pronouns *es/es* (it/it). For further discussion and a queer reading of this refer to Yocom, Margaret R. “‘But Who Are You Really?:’ Ambiguous Bodies and Ambiguous Pronouns in ‘Allerleirauh.’” *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*, edited by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill. Wayne State University Press, 2012. pp. 91-118.

Laughing Queen—a great huntress, in size and skill, cursed in the form of a spotted hyena¹⁴ by an elder of a poor tribe, to punish her selfish greed—meets a small young huntress from a small tribe of mostly female and child members. The young huntress is the only one who hunts. The mother of the young huntress has warned her about the Laughing Queen. Even though the young huntress barely gets enough for everyone in her tribe, she is generous and kind, she shares her caught meat with the Laughing Queen every time she asks for some. Every time they meet the Laughing Queen becomes bigger and stronger. The Laughing Queen proves that she is not the heartless, opportunistic creature everyone thinks she is by saving the young huntress' life when a pack of actual hyenas attack her. She earns the trust and respect not only of the young huntress, but of her entire tribe, and they welcome her into their midst. The Laughing Queen and the young huntress sleep together, in a protective embrace, and by the light of dawn The Laughing Queen has returned to her human form. The community has gained the most skilled hunter in the land, so they will fare better, and the young huntress has gained a companion in the hunt, a mentor, a friend, and perhaps more.

The embrace in “The Laughing Queen” is closely related to the romantic motif of **surviving the horrors in the night and holding onto the cursed beloved until dawn**, which appears in another two tales—discussed in the next section. However, in “The Laughing Queen” this motif is not shown as a condition to break the curse, and more like

¹⁴ Spotted Hyenas, or laughing hyenas, are the largest of the hyena species, and have a foul reputation as scavengers and for their aggression—according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica they “will burglarize food stores, steal livestock, occasionally kill people, and consume wastes.” They are also known for being good group hunters, extremely social and having a matriarchal social hierarchy, with females being larger and more aggressive than males. Also for their unique genitalia structure amongst mammals, where females have an enlarged clitoris often called “pseudo-penis.”

a happy and rewarding outcome of the main character and the Laughing Queen having overcome the challenges together. In the other two tales, the horrors often come from the curse of the beloved, like in “Bride of the Rose Beast,” where Kari has to find a way to survive her wedding night with the monster she has been forced to marry, and to hold lovingly onto said monster until the break of dawn to turn the Lindworm back into a human being; or in “Song Without End,” where Jennet must hold onto her beloved fairy knight Tam Lin, or else she will lose them forever to another fairy, Primrose who desires them. In an effort to keep Tam Lin to herself, and to bring them forever to the fairyland with her, Primrose distorts Tam Lin’s shape with her magic into all kinds of horrid visions throughout the night—manifesting as a curse on the body of the beloved. The cure is Jennet’s compassion and perseverance.

Elopement appears in two text-based stories, but only by assumption; it is never directly named. In (1.08t) “The Steadfast Tin Automaton” by Alex Singer and Jayd Ait-Kaci (*Valor: Swords*, 2015, 101-113) elopement occurs at the end of the story, after a fire engulfs the stage of the theatre where Automatons are being showcased by their Master and creator, Hoffman (to be advertised to military chiefs as objects of war). Hilde—an automaton originally created as a war machine—and Coppelia—a ballerina automaton, the newest model and most human-like—disappear, never to be found. However, rumours circulate about “[A] pair of automatons who do their own dancing. It is said they are the ‘big thing’ in America” (113), indicating that they have crossed the Atlantic ocean,

from a place called Rosenstern,¹⁵ and have made themselves into objects of art, dancing together. In (2.08t) "The Promise" by J.M. Frey and Angelica Maria Lopez (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 90-97), the elopement is a nightly, rather than a finite act. Reinnette—from the French "*Reinette*" (Little Queen), a *Fille du Roi*¹⁶— and a (nameless) She-Wolf—whose true form is a First Nations woman of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians—meet on a shore of the Sea, while Reinnette washes laundry. The She-Wolf had been wounded by white men, and an arrow still clings to her side. As Reinnette and the She-Wolf converse, she eventually gets over her fear and tends the She-Wolf's wound; in doing so, she accidentally pricks her finger with a tip of the arrow and their blood "mingles," passing a werewolf-like "curse" to Reinnette: for 101 nights she will become like the She-Wolf, taking her beastly form. It was not because of her physical wound that the She-Wolf approached Reinnette, she had been observing her for many moons: "I have heard you singing in these woods, I have watched you wander. You are lonely, as I am" (92), but this accident became the perfect excuse to have her. Reinnette is married to a man, Jean-Pierre, good but quite bland, and she feels deep love and duty towards him. For those 101 nights she escapes with her She-Wolf and lives, hunts, and runs wild like her, as her lover. On the last of these nights, she does not want to lose her curse/blessing, nor her She-Wolf lover, so she tells the truth to her husband, who loved her "fully and well" and kindly and compassionately accepted the She-Wolf, and the relationship of his wife with her, in their home for all the years to come, for he "saw no sin in sharing love where it did good in the

¹⁵ Rosenstern is a family last name of German origin meaning "Rose Star," a few businesses carry this name but I could not find any actual geographic location named as such. I assume this is a fictional place set somewhere in Germany.

¹⁶ *Les Filles du Roi*, or the King's Daughters, were approximately 800 unmarried or widowed young women who were recruited and shipped, to what was known as *La Nouvelle-France* (1534-1763), name given to a great area of North America colonised by the French, as a colonising effort sponsored by King Louis XIV, *Le Roi-Soleil*. This area includes what is now known as the province of Québec in Canada, where the capital of the colonies used to be. This story is set in Ville Marie, western Québec.

world” (97). And once Jean-Pierre had died of old age, the two She-Wolves/women returned to live wildly—occasionally helping others in the community by anonymously sharing the product of their hunts—as they had lived together during those 101 first nights.

The power of a kiss is featured in five stories, all of them in the Sapphic-Queer category; all offer representations of direct transmission of love. In “Little Fish,” a romantic kiss is featured at the end, the prince’s servant uses it as a demonstration of their feelings for the young woman, who was previously a mermaid. This kiss allows her to be free from the pact she had made with the witch, and allows her to continue her life on land as a human—otherwise, she would have been forced to return to the sea and die by turning into foam. In (2.120) “The Dance of Spring” by Aliza Layne (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 125-128), a bee wakes up to the voices of spirits murmuring that her beloved Spring has not awoken and is lost. She remembers very clearly her shape, and her dance, and follows her memory of Spring in order to find her through a frozen land. When she finds her, with a small, sweet kiss she awakens her, returning Spring to the land. In “Swan Lake,” when Princess Friedine kisses the wrong woman—Odile in the shape of Odette—she strengthens rather than breaking the curse on her beloved. In “Song Without End,” it is by kissing Primrose’s hand in a loving and desiring way, that Jennet saves the fairy Primrose from disappearing from the mortal world and transforms her into an ally and partner. In (2.210) “Sunkissed” by Sam Davies (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 197-206) a young woman crawls out from a hole in the ground; she looks exhausted, perhaps even

depressed. The Sun, in female form,¹⁷ notices the young woman. They look in each other's direction, connected by their line of sight, and the Sun descends to kiss the young woman's lips. This act transforms the young woman, gives her warmth in colour and sensation—even her dark green shirt-dress turn into a peach coloured one—she is revitalised, and walks away happy.

The romantic motif of **royal weddings** is present in five of the tales. In two of the tales, the royal wedding happens to someone who is not the protagonist, which helps advance the story. In "Little Fish," the first romantic interest of the mermaid, the prince, marries a princess from another land rather than the mermaid. This is the trigger for her to redirect her affection towards someone else, someone who desires her and is emotionally available to her: the prince's servant. In the text-based (2.16tGA) "The Robber Girl Tells her Story over a Round of Cards" by Rhiannon Rasmussen-Silverstein and Sarah Stern (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 150-154) a royal couple, a princess and a prince, have met and married before Gerda met with the band of robbers.¹⁸ The royal couple provide Gerda with high-quality warm clothes and an expensive carriage that allows her to continue her adventure towards the North, and to fulfill her mission to find her dear friend Kay, who

¹⁷ A female Sun personification, as it is traditionally depicted in Germanic cultures, e.g., the Goddess Sól or Sunna.

¹⁸ "The Robber Girl Tells her Story over a Round of Cards" is written as a fiction spin-off of Hans Christian Andersen's literary fairy-tale *Snedronningen*, or *Snow Queen* (1844). As the title states, it is told from the perspective of the Robber Girl character, who appears close to the end of the original tale. Gerda is the original protagonist of the tale. Before Gerda and the Robber Girl meet, many events have unfolded and are not explained in the short story. For example, Gerda was held captive in a beautiful garden of eternal Summer by an old sorceress who wants to keep her with her forever by making her forget about her dear friend Kai (original spelling of the name). When she breaks free from the sorceress' spell and flees from her garden, she meets a crow who tells her that there is a boy very similar to Kai in a princess' palace. Gerda has ventured to this place in her search, she meets the to-be-married royal couple and realises that the prince is not Kai. The princess and the prince sympathise and befriend Gerda, and provide her with what she needs to continue venturing towards the Wintery palace of the Snow Queen further north. Right after this is when the story starts.

was enchanted and kidnapped by the Snow Queen. Thanks to the wealthy appearance of the carriage is that the band of robbers notices her. When they assault the carriage is that she meets with the Robber Girl, who snatches her and keeps her as a precious possession—act that protects her from the other robbers. Gerda’s gentle ways, her kindness and intense determination ends up winning, perhaps ironically stealing, this Robber Girl’s heart and she frees her and gives her the means to proceed to the northernmost part of the world, the place where the Snow Queen resides all year long. “My little Gerda,” (146) she calls her, even after they have parted ways, she considers her hers regardless, deeply touched by the honest and profound gratitude Gerda showed her after she helped her and set her free.

In the other three tales, royal weddings are performed by the protagonists, in two of them—“Bride of the Rose Beast” & “All Furs”—this motif is central to the happy ending and is conjoined with the motif of **rags to riches**, where the protagonist starts in a humble position in the story and ascends, in wealth and power/social status, through this wedding. Both of these tales are retellings of classical stories, and this ending is passed down from earlier versions. Lastly, in “The Dragon Princess” the wedding at the end is an act of power and possession, going against the desires of one of the brides, thus not a happy ending for everyone involved.

The final romantic motif traced in these stories is that of the **reunion with a missing beloved**. In 9 examples, the stories are dramatic in tone, the protagonists were challenged by the experience of a loss that, in some cases, made them grow and take decisions. In “Black Bull,” the loss was the trigger for the protagonist to face and

overcome the very painful valley of glass, with a strong demon in its core, which stood between her beloved missing bull and herself. Similarly, in "The Dance of Spring," the bee is motivated to start her difficult adventure by wanting to be again with her beloved Spring. In "Swan Lake" this motif is presented as taking quick action to rectify a mistake; the moment where Princess Friedine sees Queen Odette being taken away, she is overcome with sorrow but quickly motivated to face the evil sorcerer and recover her beloved before it is too late. Likewise, in (2.130) "The Giant who Dreamed of Elves" by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 129-135), we are introduced to a couple of female giants who live in the forest and adore each other, Tall and Quiet, the giants, become separated. Tall loves elves and wants to live amongst them, but both she and Quiet have a rather fearsome orc-like appearance, and Tall is especially loud. So they come up with a plan; Quiet is to pretend she is attacking the elves while Tall plays the false heroine and gains the trust and admiration of the elves. Their plan works, but Tall did not realise that this would mean that she and Quiet would have to live separately after this. In her loud sorrow she sets off to find her missing Quiet—who hears Tall from miles away—and reunites with her; the elves witness the great adoration of these two and realise what has happened. They welcome them both in their midst, honouring their love, and gaining two fearsome but kind guardians in the process. Meanwhile in "Marie and the Nutcracker" and "Nautilus," the moment of separation is not desired but results in the realisation/confirmation of the strength of their actual desire. In "Marie and the Nutcracker" Marie must return to real-life from her dream, her beloved Nutcracker Princess has disappeared not only from her dream but of her shelf; eventually her beloved Nutcracker Princess comes back to her, better than before, in human form. In "Nautilus," the young woman has to sacrifice the magical item that allowed her and her

beloved ghost to be together in order to save her own life. However, lifting her eyes and looking outside, beyond her pain, the ghost young woman is there, greeting her again; she remained in the rain and now attached to her heart to never be lost again, they united their existences more profoundly than before.

In “The Glass Knight,” the reunion with her beloved Witch serves as the last act, of sacrifice and loyalty, for the glass woman to become the Glass Knight, an identity she had longed. In (1.23GA) "Vasilisa" by Kadi Fedoruk (*Valor: Swords*, 2015, 276-290), Vasilisa’s beloved mother dies at the beginning of the tale, which leaves her vulnerable and causes a series of Cinderella-type of events to unfold. Prior to her death, her mother had gifted her a Matryoshka (Матрёшка, “little matron” in Russian) doll. Oblivious to Vasilisa, her mother’s spirit has always been with her inside it. Near the end of the tale her mother’s ghost comes out of the doll and shows herself, sacrificing herself to prevent her daughter from being afflicted by a curse. This reunion is partial since there was never a complete separation, but it frees the protagonist from her past and allows her to move freely in the world afterwards. Lastly, in (2.11GAO) "A Little Bird Told Me" by Justin Lanjil (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 113-124) the reunion is not with only one beloved woman, but with a whole sisterhood. In this tale, a Valkyrja, a female warrior from Norse mythology,¹⁹ must prove her valour and virtue in a challenge in order to be allowed to return to her Valkyrjur sisterhood. Once she succeeds, by preventing the unnecessary

¹⁹ Valkyrja means “chooser of the slain” in old Norse. Valkyrjur were the female supernatural entities, “associated with fairness, brightness, and gold, as well as bloodshed” that would recruit the most worthy warriors, who had died a dignified war/battle death, for Valhöll (or Valhalla), the warrior paradise realm ruled by the god Odin. For more information refer to "Valkyrie." Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Valkyrie-Norse-mythology>).

demise of a child with a fighting spirit, the magical key to open the portal to her land is returned and she gleefully reunites with her warrior sisters.

Visual Motif: Hands & Desire in Sapphic-Queer Tales

We orient our hands and they orient us. Sara Ahmed observes hands as starting points for things to begin becoming queer, for it is through the hands that we experience the world; the moment we face our hands in their process, that we experience them as they experience objects, is a moment of disorientation and reorientation, our hands become queer objects in our experience of them. “We begin with the ‘me’ as the place where something happens, a little strangeness or awkwardness that emerges over time, as if it has a life of its own. The becoming strange of the body does not stay with ‘me.’ For if it is my hands that are strange, then it is my hands as they express themselves in a gesture. Such gestures are the ‘point’ where my hands meet with objects: where they cease to be apart; where they pick things up” (Ahmed 2006, 163) Through the observance/experience of these acts, hands may tell their own stories of desire in sensual ways. They extend from our bodies to shorten the distance between us and other objects/bodies in the world, and in doing so they create lines, connections. We use our hands to reach out towards what we desire. Our desires begin within us, and our hands extend them into the world, igniting desire-directed lines of motion that may express, and even transmit onto other objects/bodies, such desire. Our hands become even queerer when brought to life by these desires, and when passing this life force onto the objects that attract and inspire this (e)motions. Hands communicate in unspoken ways; they leave

carnal traces and impressions on/in what they come in contact with. They are sensual media and tool, and they can be our erotic agents—or they themselves can turn into erotic objects. In this sense, this is a particularly characteristic icon and long-standing trope in Sapphic eroticism and sexualities,²⁰ as a sexual tool as well as a marker of gender: strong or delicate in appearance, actions and movements, the fist that fights, the hand that heals. In these all-ages fairy-tales with Sapphic-Queer content, desire is several times expressed through graphic motions of hands, in an intentional centring of hands, sometimes via a close-up panel. These panels usually appear following, or preceding, a moment of romantic, erotic and/or loving connection.

In this section I follow the visual traces of hands as phenomenological tools of Sapphic-Queer desire via a series of readings of the tales that I have found to contain representations of them. These readings are mainly informed by Sara Ahmed's philosophical work in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), particularly her concepts of the experience of objects, points, lines, horizons, directions, orientations and disorientations.

²⁰ For further discussion of the appearance of this motif in various media, mainly film, refer to Merck, Mandy. "The Lesbian Hand." *In Your Face: 9 Sexual Studies*. New York; New York University Press, 2000, pp.124-147.



(Fig. 4) Hands close-up.



(Fig. 5) Teaching of Sign Language.

In (1.02) “Little Fish” by Emily Hann (*Valor: Swords* 2015, 20-33) hands become a particularly powerful symbol because this is the story of a mermaid who gives up her voice in order to become a human woman and find the love that she is unable to find with her cold kin at the bottom of the ocean. Her family avoids her touch and shuns her affection (23), the only thing we see her holding close is a fairy-tale book. She finally lets it go when she decides to seek her happiness—for hands need to let go of what they hold, what is familiar, in order to experience something else, and this act can create a point of reference and comparison between what was before and what can be, between the dreams that were once taught by a book to a lonely child and a new reality that results stranger (with previously unimagined possibilities) than the fiction in those dreams. The narrator of this tale, a transmasculine nameless servant of the prince,²¹ finds the former mermaid voiceless and naked on the shore of their homeland—an illustration of the shocks and vulnerability in many acts of migration. This servant becomes her protector from this

²¹ The pronouns for this character are absent from the text, they are always addressed directly in the first or second person pronouns. They present a more masculine persona in their community through the way they dress and present themselves—the use of a breast binder included, which is presented at the very beginning of the tale in page 21 in *Valor: Swords*. In the present text, I am taking the liberty of referring to this character with the singular third person “they/them” pronouns because I consider that their neutrality may offer more non-binary possibilities.

point on; they give her a shelter under their roof and provide for her, they also become her means of integrating into her new society and kin. Moreover, the servant also becomes her teacher as they introduce her to Sign Language (Fig. 5), a *language of hands*, so that she can have a (new) voice and be able to communicate again—taking the meaning of hands and their phenomenological experiences of connection to a deeper level, one of interactions of sights, sounds, and motions. Hands must dance and draw invisible shapes and forms in the air to not only convey but to teach meanings, in this case it is a learned dance of two pairs of hands mirroring motions, guided by the servant’s spoken words, by the sounds emitted by her mouth. It is not clear if the Little Fish already has an understanding of the human words she is hearing, perhaps she is simultaneously learning new gestures/motions and the sounds that accompany them by linking them to the actions that bodies perform (such as eating), and the objects these bodies interact with (food, for example). Furthermore, perhaps these very objects that in the human world are mundane and familiar, to her they are alien and new, bringing a deeper layer of complexity to her learning, her hands must experience *everything* as new. The servant reorients her at every moment of disorientation in the tale, and hands and touch are always involved. For example, in a key scene in the tale, the Little Fish tries to gain the appreciation of the prince during a meal. At first she tries to connect with the prince by showing him some of the hand gestures she has learned to communicate, but this line of connection fails given his ignorance and lack of interest in Sign Language, or what she has to say. He, without much thought, pets her head in a paternalistic way and asks her to continue being so “entertaining” (28). At this remark, she promptly stands and begins to perform a dance for him. Her legs still bear the fresh wounds of her human transformation, they hurt and bleed, she falls to the ground in the middle of her dance,

only to realise that the prince had already left the hall. She is left disoriented in a moment that can be so familiar, if seen as a mirror to the neglect she experienced before with her mermaid family. The sharp pain in her legs brings tears to her eyes and refocus her in the present moment of abandonment, one that soon vanishes when the servant—who witnessed the whole scene, standing in the back of the room—comes forth and holds her arm, comforting her “Don’t worry, it’s going to be okay” (28). This action redirects her to a hopeful perspective, one in which she is warmly held and not alone, further reinforced by two more servants who approach and, smiling, help the transmasculine servant carry the Little Fish away from the scene. In this (re)direction she is safe, she has a group of people, a potential family and community who cares for her.

The Little Fish is, however, romantically oriented towards the prince, perhaps informed by the only source of romantic knowledge she had, and held so close, in her previous life: her book of fairy-tales. It may be that she could not recognise love or desire beyond those horizons. The prince—as fairy-tale princes do—marries a princess and never realises (or cares) for the affections or actions of the Little Fish—his attention directed somewhere else, she is hardly in his line of sight. In Ahmed’s words: “What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken. Some objects don’t even become objects of perception, as the body does not move toward them: they are ‘beyond the horizon’ of the body, and thus out of reach” (2006, 55). The prince is the one who nicknamed this ex-mermaid “Little Fish” in the first place, that is the shape of her as an object in his mind, she is not the right kind of object to fit in his world or his horizon—from the perspective of the angle through which he looks at the world. He is the prince of (t)his land, the point at the peak of a pyramid of power, her powerless and

disadvantaged position place her far away from, even in the opposite direction, of his orientation. On the other hand, in the mind of the Little Fish, the prince seems like the perfect object, he even seems as the *only* object she is meant to desire. She learned his form in her heteronormative fairy-tale book, he is the familiar object she grew believing in and desiring, the one shining and high point in which she idealised and projected her *happy ending*—given her previous limited line of knowledge, the ignorance that made other reachable objects unrecognisable in her orientation towards love. She despairs, the only recognisable object in her horizon is out of reach, he always was, but she has just realised it. The servant, her protector, notices; unlike the Little Fish, they can read her, they can see her and she is an important object in her horizon. The servant once more draws a line of connection towards her, they want to help her once more, to understand what is throwing her so far out of peace. The Little Fish she tells them, through desperate and sorrowful hand motions, that she will die—turning into sea foam— because she was unable to get the love of a human she had chosen as her romantic object, as the time-limited condition for her to roam the land was to achieve this.²² Right after this, we see the servant taking the mermaid's hand (Fig. 4), pulling her closer and making obvious the care and desire they have for her; reorienting her towards them, making her face in the direction of their affectionate desire—what was barely in her line of sight before, a desire and love that grew over time, invested in her best interest and well-being. They pull and take in their hands not just the Little Fish's hand, but her whole body; they carry her

²² This condition is signalled via images on page 24 (Valor: Swords, 2015). During the visit of the Little Fish to the sea witch, the witch ominously holds the mermaid's annular left-hand finger, making a golden ring of light appear around it. It seems to be a symbol of marriage rather than one of love, but because of the silences (lack of text or further visual explanation) the specifics are lost, perhaps the condition is a marriage of love, or the symbol of marriage stands for a long-lasting relationship of love, or simply a deep union born out of love that may morph overtime. In any case, for the Little Fish, it is either this or dying when returning to her homeland if she fails.

above the sea, sinking together into the ocean, locked in a kiss and a gentle embrace, hands over each other's bodies. Love is used as a powerful counterforce, and as a reward for the affection-starved young woman.



(Fig. 6) Kari whipping the Lindworm.



(Fig. 7) Roza & Kari's wedding.

In (1.03) "Bride of the Rose Beast" by Michelle "Misha" Krivanek (*Valor: Swords* 2015, 34-48) hands must perform violent actions, and here is where the close-up panels focus. The desire that hands first express is to survive the wedding night after being forcefully married to a powerful and murderous beast—a limbless Lindworm that has known from birth only fear and disgust, no caring touch. The king, the powerful patriarchal figure in the story, has commanded/convincing a poor shepherd to give his only daughter, Kari, in marriage to the Lindworm. The intensity of this scaly beast's desire is monstrous—Lindworms are a kind of dragon after all,²³ and dragons are often symbols of deep greed—it had already devoured whole its previous brides, two Princesses from neighbouring lands. The Lindworm is of royal blood, it is the older twin of the Prince, and demands a bride for itself before his brother can marry and continue the

²³ Most commonly depicted in Scandinavian Art and culture as a kind of serpentine dragon with only two legs, or two wings—e.g., as seen in many Runestones.

royal blood line. This, of course, is the main worry of the King, who is willing to sacrifice other lifelines to perpetuate his own; he would rather turn a young girl of colour into a sacrificial object than to risk causing more political distress and war—after all, there are already two missing Princesses and shallow cover-ups to account for their fates. However, Kari is a brave girl, her will does not break just by facing the Lindworm; she has wisdom (of mind and of physical strength) the Princesses did not possess. A Wise Woman in the forest has told her what to do to tame the beast during the wedding night, in order to survive. She is meant to wear ten layers of nightshirts, and when the Lindworm commands her to undress, she must reply in equal force for it to shed a skin. When both bodies are left in their last intimate covering layer, she must soak six whips in lye. Kari's hands have been shaped by hard work, and they are prepared for the intensity that is required to break the will of the monster. The whips are quite literally drawn as lines extending from her hands, lines of fast intense motion that keep her a safe distance from fatal harm (Fig. 6). Kari also has what is needed for the next step: strength of spirit, loving-kindness, compassion. She must pour milk on the lacerated skin of the suffering monster, to soothe the fires of physical pain, and pull it with her to bed, hold it tenderly close to her until the break of dawn, to heal the spiritual/emotional wounds of the beast. Kari awakens to find herself disoriented once more, her arms still held fast to the body between her arms; it has transformed. She can see in the light of the morning sun a beautiful young white woman, sleeping peacefully. She awakens as well, just as surprised in her new form, her new face, she has never been human before, she has never been held before. When their lines of sight meet—the power-line has been levelled, they now share a horizon and meet as equals—they break together in joy and laughter; the horrors have ended, the curse is broken, they have both survived and thrived. Their fates have been

transformed in the traumatic process, which opens new and pleasurable experiences for them to create together. In the next and last panel of the graphic narrative, we see them both as brides, her foreheads touching, their hands held together—Kari’s hand protectively surrounding Roza’s, who being newly human and woman, now has a name. They are uniting their lives, their lifelines symbolised through their connecting arms, together in a committed lifeline of marriage—another kind of interplay of pleasure and pain. Although this life-union was at first set in their horizons as an imposed fate, the pleasure drawn as bright smiles on their faces has transformed it into a desired outcome, a desired path, a new orientation they are willing to face and follow through.²⁴



(Fig. 8) Meeting, hand, & bull. (Fig. 9) Stabbing the glass demon. (Fig. 10) Reunion.

In (1.10) "Black Bull" by Justin Lanjil (*Valor: Swords* 2015, 126-138) a young woman and her two sisters give shelter to an old woman on a cold, rainy night. As a thankful gesture, she instructs them to look outside the window each morning; there they will encounter the paths that will take them to their fortunes—that is, each sister would see in her horizon a new object appear, one that would orient their individual lifelines in separate directions. The eldest found a carriage; the middle, a female knight; the youngest

²⁴ This is the only fairy-tale in the Sapphic-Queer category that ends with the romantic coupling of a wedding and the words "Happily Ever After."

an imposing-looking beast, a hefty black bull. This young woman reaches out her hand to the bull in their meeting (Fig. 8), as a gesture of desire for the path to her happy fortune. She talks to the bull, and it talks back to her, and her fate-desiring hand recoiling for a fleeting moment of disorientation because she did not expect the animal to be capable of human speech. The bull—a beast which lacks hands—lowers its mighty shape as a gesture of submission to her desire, and offers to take her to her destiny, a desirable and mysterious point beyond the horizon. The woman accepts, climbing on its back. The bull is her queer vehicle, taking her towards an unknown, but promised happiness.

They travel long distances together, sharing all the pleasures of the journey—all the new objects that appear in their shared horizon, the sights, nature, fruits, and music. The hands of the young woman often wandering in new colourful experiences and textures—the changing stages of the leaves, fruits from the trees, even holding the hands of a dancer in a fair they passed by—yet, always returning to hold onto the safety of the great beast’s neck and loin. Eventually, terrible, sharp glass mountains, and a valley in-between them, draw near as they advance. A demon lives here, one that is yet out of sight but that the bull knows about. This knowledge hints at the fact that this path they are going down together is familiar to the bull, who has traversed it before, perhaps several times. The woman does not know where the path leads. She is at the mercy of the bull; she trusts it even though the bull’s desire and intentions are a mystery to her. The bull is her orienting device, and it is orienting her towards its desire, where she has been told her own desire resides. The bull intends to cross this ominous valley and fight the demon; it asks the woman to remain behind and watch the sky for a change of colour; if blue, the bull has defeated the demon and it is safe to pass, if it turns red, the bull has failed and she “must

not venture near” (131). The bull parts from her hand, from her, it descends into the valley. The woman finds herself looking at the horizon once more to find a sign—another object to direct her. She stops her forward motion temporarily to consider a new meaningful perspective, with fear of a great loss, but with also hopeful expectations—her hand resting on her chest, pressing her gently in place, guarding her beating heart. As the sky begins to turn blood red, she arms herself with determination—signalled by the clenching of her hand into a fist—, regardless of the warning, she proceeds into the valley. She cares deeply for this bull, she is far too invested in this lifeline, and in her desire for her promised fate beyond the visible horizon, she is not willing to simply experience these losses without fighting, without trying.

Down in the valley, she faces the dangerous and lupine-like glass demon (another handless creature); she does not have a plan, just the strong will to go on, to survive and reach her desired destination. An object appears in her line of sight, under the demon: a broken black horn in a pool of blood. She takes this horn as an extension of her hand/body, a piece of her dear lost bull, and uses it in self-defence to stab the only opening in the demon’s sturdy glass body, its exposed chest cavity, where its heart might be (Fig. 9). When the demon lies dead—this huge attention-demanding object that blocked her line of sight—she notices a bloody trail leading out of the valley. This bloody trace, a line made out of points of pain, is joined by her own blood drops as she painfully climbs—the flesh on her hands and feet stabbed and shredded. At the top, she finds a humble cottage much like hers—a familiar object, reminiscent of the one left behind—and discovers the old woman from before, waiting for her outside. She has been blindly following a line in a queer fateful loop drawn by another, almost like stepping into a

mirror of her previous reality. The old woman invites her in, and introduces her to her daughter, and this new woman sadly and silently tends to her wounds. In this silence, the young woman's horizon is coloured with pain, tears draw hopeless lines over her face. The young healer seeks to comfort her in silence by reaching out and holding her arm, but the young woman's mind is still disoriented and lost, the hand that touched her with sympathy feels strange to her. Her fortune in this end of the line does not seem happy at all, she has lost all the familiar objects and her affective connections; her sisters are gone, the bull is missing, whatever happy fortune she had imagined at the end of her journey was seemingly missing as well—a sudden break in her desired line of fate.

After her wounds have been tended, the young woman is beginning to resign to her new context—her new field of mirrored objects. Her hands, her interrupted desired, bandaged and resting. She happens to pass by a window while following the dark-haired woman, she looks outside, like she did back home before her journey, and yet another familiar directing line appears before her: traces of the bull's hoof-prints. Her desire is reignited, the bandages disappear from her hands, her motions intensely reactivated by the hope to recover her lost bull; her original journey is not over. She reaches demandingly at the dark-haired woman's arm "Where is the bull?" (137). The dark-haired woman stutters, held back perhaps by a degree of shame, until she finally pours out the truth: she is the bull. She and her mother brought her there, and she made her go through that painful terrain—one she herself had gone through at least twice. For unknown reasons, she was cursed to take the shape of a bull, her old wise mother's magic was only capable to extend to the shape of the cottage, the domestic realm, the only place where she could turn back into a woman. Outside of this space, she would be turned into—or

perceived as—a hefty masculine beast, even though she retained her gentle spirit. Her mother sent her to the young woman “in hopes of breaking the curse” (137). The young woman is gladly disoriented and reoriented by this revelation, and she is not crossed at the manipulation of the old wise woman or the Bull Woman—what she believed to be her fate organically unfolding as a path-line before her. It was the old wise woman who calculated the fateful meetings and the events that led the three women to this point in the tale, disguising them as fortune-telling, and her daughter the vehicle. In any case, the young woman is glad to welcome this destiny. Perhaps the young woman she has not yet fully realised the whole weight of the situation, or maybe part of her gladness is that the manipulation happened in the first place because of how much she was desired/needed to break a curse, and also due to how much she herself desired to welcome a different life experience, whether it was organic or artificially made for her. She is full of gladness, and so is her hand, she reaches to touch the other woman’s face gently, to take in herself the experience of new shape; the object she had thought lost was not, it had only been mixed, in shape and location, she was facing a different side of it that seemed unfamiliar, one she could not have had access to (knowledge of) before. (Fig. 10) She recognises her not only as her recovered dear travelling companion, but as the fortune she so desired to grasp, her sought object and the point on the horizon come to match and its shape is not a mystery anymore. Furthermore, with the breaking of the curse—assumed it was broken because the tale is not explicit about it—the Bull Woman has her hands back permanently, she may herself re-experience the world outside in her new shape, with greater agency than only being the vehicle of others’ desires.



(Fig. 11) Close embrace.

In the last panel, the two women hold each other as close as physically possible, each other's hands resting content and full, holding onto their backs; their bodies directed entirely towards each other. The old woman and her house have faded; they are now equals, willing vehicles of each other's desires (Fig. 11).



(Fig. 12) 2nd Hands close-up.

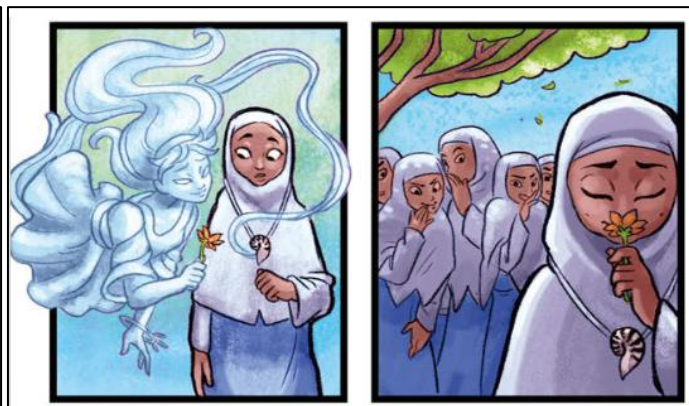
(Fig. 13) Invitation and dance scene.

In (2.05) "Marie and the Nutcracker" by Emily Hann (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 50-62), Marie and her Nutcracker Princess are shown joining hands in several panels. Two scenes illustrate this most clearly. One occurs when the Nutcracker Princess—who is

Marie's newest toy brought to life by magic—takes Marie's hand to take her into the Toy Kingdom (Fig. 12). The second moment happens once they are within the Toy Kingdom and the Nutcracker Princess invites Marie to dance. This sequence is a ludic dance of two bodies circling each other in joyful motions, with their hands held in the centre as their gravitational pivots (Fig. 13). Such hands touch fully and honestly, in an honest youthful expression, with all the toy world surrounding, witnessing, celebrating the togetherness and new true friendship of these two girls. The audience has disappeared from focus in these images, the girls have lost sight of them as they concentrate on each other. The magical moment only breaks when Marie is forced to go back to the real world. She was dreaming. In her desire to return to the closest semblance of that interrupted moment of pleasure, she runs to find her Nutcracker, which/who she had expected to be in the cabinet with the rest of her dolls. Right after the brief disorienting moment when she realises her beloved Nutcracker is gone, her Godfather—the toymaker, the one who gifted her the Nutcracker doll in the first place—enters the room with a girl he introduces as his niece, who looks strangely familiar. In the last panel, both girls smile at each other, a shy smile of recognition and contentment.



(Fig. 14) Sweet rose gift.



(Fig. 15) Orange star flower gift.

The tale of “Marie and the Nutcracker” also features another romantic motif related to motions of hands, one that expresses the desire of the giver for the receiver via a subtle seduction of other senses—taste and olfaction—through the gift of a flower. Gifting flowers is a long held human tradition to express romantic love/passion, loyalty/fidelity, gratefulness, appreciation, divine or mundane adoration, sympathy, healing wishes, good fortune, remorse/asking for forgiveness, celebratory congratulations for especial events or achievements, a challenge, etc. It is a type of unspoken communication that varies across time and cultures.²⁵ The flower of the Nutcracker Princess’ choice to gift Marie is a red rose, a flower that globally is read as a symbol of deep romantic love and passion, joined by the fact that it is made of some form of sweet material—it is not specified exactly which kind of candy it is, chocolate, perhaps—, a joined symbol that easily alludes to the western tradition of Valentine’s Day (Fig. 14). The Nutcracker Princess seeks to give Marie a first taste of her world—the Toy Kingdom, a place full of wonderful queer objects. She is eager for them to explore her magical land together and for everyone to meet Marie, a reversal of roles where the new toy wants to brag about its new owner.

A similar flower motif appears in another tale in the Sapphic-Queer category, (1.180) “Nautilus” by Ash Barnes and Elena “Yamino” Barbarich (*Valor: Swords*, 2015, 216-230). (Fig. 15). However, while the motivation for the ghost girl to express her desire for the living girl is similar, there is also a quite different level of appreciation from the ghost girl to the living girl compared to the two girls in the previous story. This is not

²⁵ Floriography is the Victorian-born term given to the language and meaning of flower and flower gifting as we know it today.

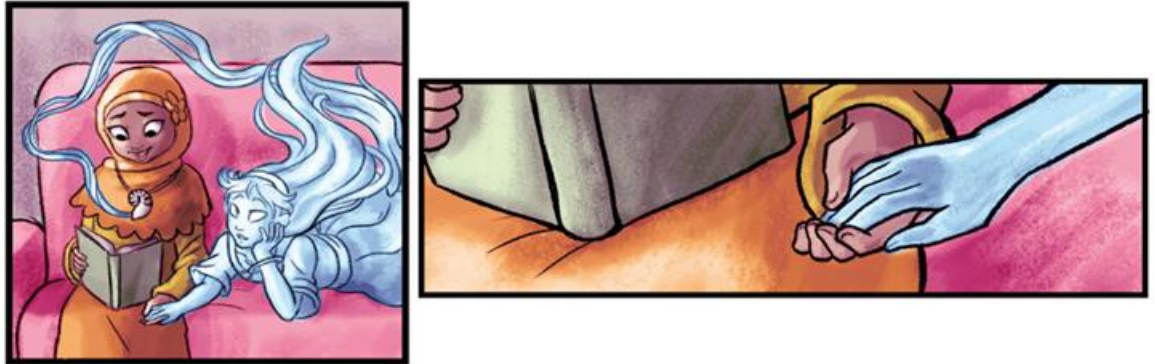
their first time meeting, their line is not at the point of a beginning, but rather at a point of a slow transformation in the unusual life they have been sharing—even though one of



(Fig. 16) 3rd Hands close-up.

them is already dead, the two girls have *grown* together since the ghost saved the life of the other in their childhood years. On the fateful day they met, the living girl almost died by falling into an underground water cave, as a result of being persecuted and bullied by three boys. In this cavern she met the ghost of this dead girl—and her skeletal remains, as a cold indication of what could have happened to her as well, the (horizon) line she could have crossed had she not been fortunate. The horror the living girl was experiencing—a great disorientation, caught in a deep dark, in what at first seemed to be the ominous and terrifying encounter with a being not of the physical world—soon turned into hope when the ghost girl held her hand (Fig. 16), and guided her through an underwater tunnel—a hidden line in a temporarily unknown direction, for all she knew she might have been taking her to darker point of demise. They reached the surface from another vein of the cavern, the living girl only lost a shoe and a sock, and they both won a friend. The ghost girl's existence was somehow anchored to her remains in the water; she could not leave the cavern on her own. The living girl recognises in her a kin spirit, she is grateful as well, and glad to have a new friend; she wants to take her home with her. She found a beautiful new little home for her friend—perhaps stolen from an oblivious hermit crab that is seen passing by—, a nautilus shell, another bone-like structure to be anchored to—a portable one, one the living girl can move as she desires. The ghost girl carries in her spiritual essence the element she inhabits in death, water, a crucial element for life; like water, she can adapt and change

form and size. From this moment on, both girls become inseparable, they share everything, they go everywhere together, they do everything together, and their hands are often held—the motif of the hand close-up dedicated panel shows up again (Fig. 17).



(Fig. 17) 4th Hands close-up.

By the time the ghost offers the token of her desire and affection, the orange star flower—perhaps an orange Lily, another symbol of love and joy—they are growing into young women. The living girl receives this gift and takes the experience of it deep into her senses, so close that it seems to become part of her face, and with such concentration—and perhaps even devotion—that nothing else seems to exist in her world. In her trance, perhaps she does not even notice the stacked whispering objects in the background, the other young women who witness this intimate moment, but only from a partial and skewed angle—besides them being away and behind her, the ghost girl is invisible to everyone else, *only* the living girl experiences her, she is an object only available to her. The ghost girl has been living vicariously through the living one, nevertheless, she has a mind of her own, and this a scene in which she performs an improvised action to pleasantly surprise the other. They live now outside of the living girl's parents' home, in a space of their own, where they can both extend themselves fully.

In a way, they fill each other completely, they have saved each other from their deep empty well of loneliness, or, maybe, the ghost girl is the result of the living one having experienced such a deep experience of isolation and loneliness. She could be the ethereal manifestation—a mirage object, one that is there because it is not, like an imagined oasis in a desert—of her own desire, the fantasy that she cannot yet fully materialise. Nearing the end of the tale, the three menacing once-boys now men return and corner the living girl in an alley, they have become aggressive and confident in their ways—lines they have fortified via repetition—and even tear away her Tudong,²⁶ she punches one of them back in reaction, and immediately realises in how much danger she is in. They did not hesitate to try to kill her years before, now that they have grown stronger and crueller, more painful possibilities could occur before ending her life. It is raining. The ghost girl commands the living one to break the magical object that is the link between their worlds, and in doing so, the ghost transforms into a huge tidal wave that washes—maybe drowns in the process—the three young men away, allowing the living girl to escape. She returns home devastated, in absolute disorientation, there is nothing to anchor her anywhere in that moment. She believes she has lost her ghost girl by sacrificing the nautilus shell. The tears, lines of sorrow, flowing from her eyes mirror the rain outside the window. And from the rain a familiar figure emerges: her ghost girl. She traverses the transparent barrier that is the window, she crosses over and they both embrace tightly—ethereal as she may be, the experience is fully physical to the living girl. The ghost girl is now anchored to the living girl’s beating heart, an action that brings the biggest happiness to them both. After the traumatic experience of violence and loss, the anchoring point has

²⁶ A Tudong (تَدُونْج in Jawi) is a type of Malay hijab (حجاب in Arabic)—traditional Muslim head cover for females.

migrated into the innermost core, the safest spot in the life-sustaining object, and object quite often symbolically oriented to love/passion.



(Fig. 18) 5th hands close-up & Jennet's invitation to Primrose.

In (2.20) "Song Without End" by Rennie Kingsley (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 190-196) a new kind of close-up panel makes desire more evident, in this direct action the hand is joined by the mouth—perhaps the most expressive of our erogenous points—in the performance of a kiss, dispelling doubts, reducing the interference of the message. Primrose, Jennet, and Tam Lin have just come out of a most exhausting night. Jennet, a human young woman, and Primrose, a female fairy, were in a challenge, a duel of endurance to decide who would keep Tam Lin, “the bonniest knight fairyland has ever seen...” (195). To win, Jennet was to hold tight to Tam Lin’s body until the break of dawn—the breaking point of the night-line and the ending/renewing one of an ancient

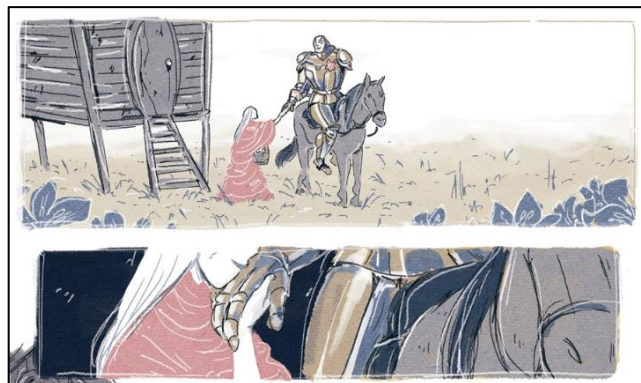
sacred cycle since it is also the eve of Samhain²⁷—while it was being chaotically and continuously morphed into all kinds of twisted forms by Primrose’s magic. This is the second tale in which the romantic motif of surviving the horrors in the night & holding onto the cursed beloved until dawn appears—the other tale being “Bride of the Rose Beast,” previously discussed in this section. Tam Lin exists as a constantly queered object throughout the night, continuously changing before everyone’s sight. Even without this experience, Tam Lin’s body is already a queer object on its own, they are a fairy knight of undefined gender,²⁸ perhaps the tale points in a way as this being the quality that makes them the “bonniest knight in fairyland,” the most desirable, or at least for the two young women. Primrose tries her best to change the perspective of Jennet, to disorient her enough for her to let go of Tam Lin, she even tries to tempt her with the promise of land and wealth, trying to guess and tap into other of her desires.

Meanwhile, Tam Lin is stripped of all their agency, they become quite literally a desired object during the ordeal. Dawn arrives and Primrose is defeated, her desire frustrated, and she is now the one who is trapped in the mortal world, and might disappear without something to anchor her. The portal between fairyland and the mortal, the point of contact, has closed/disappeared at the line of dawn. Her silhouette starts losing its colour as she cries and admits to the truth of her jealousy, she desires to be

²⁷ According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Samhain, (Celtic: “End of Summer”) also spelled Samain, in ancient Celtic religion, one of the most important and sinister calendar festivals of the year. At Samhain, held on November 1, the world of the gods was believed to be made visible to humankind, and the gods played many tricks on their mortal worshippers; it was a time fraught with danger, charged with fear, and full of supernatural episodes. Sacrifices and propitiations of every kind were thought to be vital, for without them the Celts believed they could not prevail over the perils of the season or counteract the activities of the deities. Samhain was an important precursor to Halloween.”

²⁸ Tam Lin is the only character in all the 25 stories in the Sapphic-Queer category who is directly referenced with the singular they/them pronouns.

beloved, brave, and admired like Jennet is, and, in a way, desires Jennet as well “You’re only *everything* I’ve ever wanted, everything I can never be” (*emphasis* in original, 195)—a situation in which the subject is confused by the object of desire, by deeply identifying with it. In a sudden turn of events, Jennet holds Primrose’s hand and returns her silhouette—her disappearing lines—to her through a sensual and affective invitation, one to makes her realise that she *can* have that “everything” that seemed unattainable, *she needed only ask*. (Fig 18) Jennet offers her a different direction towards which their fates can move together, a different romantic and life (field) arrangement for the three of them to share and explore. Both Primrose and Tam Lin are disoriented by this, only for a moment, then they all walk towards a new horizon, already figuring out possibilities—if there are no beds left intact in Caterhough Castle, as it seems Primrose gave them quite a Hell that destroyed more than we got to see, at least “there’s some lovely moss” (196). Jennet has not only forgiven all transgressions but welcomed them and has made the best of the situation. This is the only ending directed at polyamory, and only one more story features polyamory in the middle of it, the text-based (2.08t) "The Promise" by J.M. Frey and Angelica Maria Lopez (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 90-97), and a Sapphic supernatural couple throughout the tale—reminiscent both of Estés’ Wild Woman archetype.



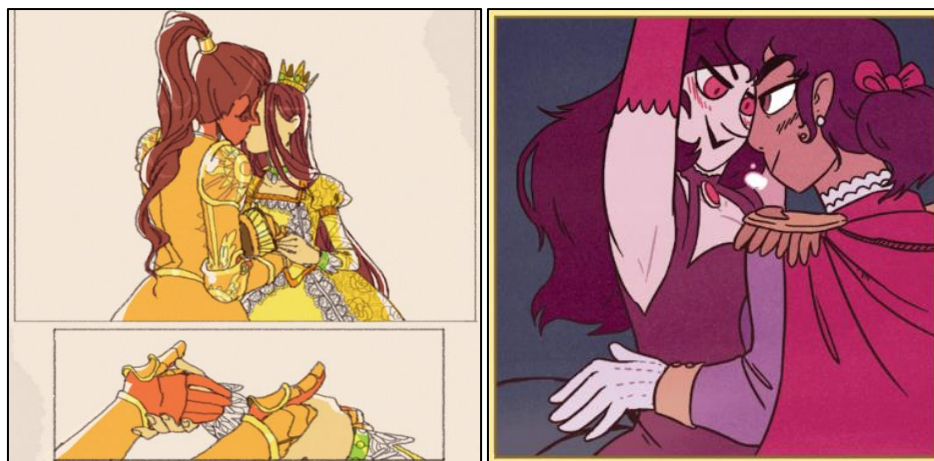
(Fig. 19) The Witch kisses her Glass Knight’s hand.

The second appearance of the desiring hand joined by a kiss of the lips occurs in (2.170) "The Glass Knight" by Capp & Lin (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 155-167). This is the story of a nameless witch who is "kind, romantic, and terribly lonely"; she lives in an isolated area, somewhere in a humble cottage amidst a field of coral-coloured lilies.²⁹ Her whole life centres in this one point in the world, she has a routine and she works hard in it—religiously tending what seems to be an endless field/horizon of coral lilies—yet she lacks a direction, she is stuck in an endless loop. As a result, to keep the deep sorrows at bay, she made a companion for herself. She made her beautiful, big, and strong-looking; however, she spun her "from the finest venetian glass" (156), most beautifully elaborate, and most delicate. The Witch brought her to life by taking one of her coral lilies and placing it lovingly in her glass bosom—making an otherwise extremely common object in the field special, giving it a function, starting a lifeline. The glass companion at first is like a golem, she only follows her Lady around in her eternal loop of a day, bound to her will alone.

As time goes on—the one direction that, in this plane/field, we cannot truly stop ourselves from moving towards—she begins to develop her own consciousness, her own will; she tries to help the Witch with the chores, but the Witch always prevents her from doing anything else than accompanying her, she does not want her scratched, or worse, broken—she was made to be *only* a companion, to need the one she accompanies. One

²⁹ Lilies are a flower culturally imbued with many meanings globally, they are both linked to weddings and to purity and chastity—one of its oldest meanings is as a symbol of May and the Madonna—, as well as to mourning and honouring the dead. In Japan they are a very popular motif in the 少女漫画 (Shōjo Manga, or girl stories), particularly in the Sapphic 百合 (Yuri, literally means "lily") genre—this cultural attribution is because of the purity perceived in the love between two girls and two women, both in depth of mind and emotion, as well as the assumed image of virginity, reminiscent of the archetype of the temple Priestesses.

evening, as the Witch reads romantic fairy-tales to her glass companion, she begins identifying with the figure of the knight—she was an object made to serve, she wanted to feel useful, strong, courageous, and *independent*, to have her own direction and orientation. As sweet as her Witch is, as much as she loves her, her life in bondage, without freedom of movement, is turning unliveable—even for someone made of glass and not flesh and bones, a lifeline cannot develop if one is stuck in a single point in time/space. She wants a direction, she wants to prove herself a knight and come back to her Lady. As sorrowful as this is for the Witch, she loves her glass companion so much, she wants her happy, and she lets her go. Eventually the glass woman proves herself a more than capable (and independent) knight, she remained intact in her adventures, only sacrificing an arm in her return, to save her Witch from beneath the deep waters of “regret and shame” that she found her in—this regret and shame came from realising the error she had made by allowing her fear to get the better of her and interfering with her Glass Knight’s agency a few times before, not believing her capable of surviving on her own. The whole field drowned, her sorrow extended throughout the space she inhabits. It is in the action of the knight of saving her Lady from her distress that her lady, her Witch, fully recognises/graduates her as “my brave knight, and one without compare” (166). Right after this scene the coral lily field is back in a healthy state, and the Glass Knight is in her shining metal armour and on a brown steed about to leave onto an another adventure. The Witch holds her remaining hand, and kisses her goodbye, longing for her soon return. (Fig.19)



(Fig. 20) Dragon Princess wedding. (Fig. 21) Odile seduces Princess Friedine.

The collection does feature one dedicated panel close-up where the hands do not desire, and one panel illustration where the hands are not needed to express desire as an extension, because the whole body is quite directly involved in this action instead. The Princess in (2.220) "The Dragon Princess" by Ametalias (*Valor: Wands 2*, 2018, 207-217) is fascinated by dragons because "they steal the good from the world to keep for themselves" (215), and the greed to which she is accustomed set loose in herself can only be compared in this mythical proportions. When flowers bloomed, she would cut all of them and take her to her room, so that the whole garden would be hers alone—in her regal position, she has the power to displace whole fields of objects at a whim, without care for any consequences. Likewise, when she met a certain beautiful knight, she wanted her for herself, and to possess her, she married her. The Princess holds the Knight's hands, but the Knight's hands do not hold hers, they are limp, open, a big empty gap in the middle—this is not the path the body/subject desires, stolen dreams do not extend through the hands, they do not motivate desire (Fig. 20). The ending is mixed, the Princess is triumphant, her greed got away with another bigger crime; the Knight is

disoriented, the horizon they gaze together is not hers at all, it has been overtaken by the Princess'. Yet perhaps there is some hope, because the Princess is becoming self-aware of her dragon ways, maybe the lines ahead will take them in a transformative direction in this fairy-tale, and they were friends before, but it cannot be said for sure.

Lastly, in (2.15) "Swan Lake" by Natalie Riess (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 138-149), Odile, a magical black swan shapeshifter in service of the evil Sorcerer Rothbarth, has taken the bodily shape of Swan Queen Odette—the object of desire of Princess Friedine—to seduce the Princess in her betrothal ball, and trick her into pleading eternal love to her instead (Fig. 21)—an intentionally deceiving queer object. This is so that Rothbarth can keep Odette for himself, a plea of true love would break Odette free from her curse and her captivity—free to become human again and roam the world, only if loved in the “true” way—but a plea of true love to the wrong object can backfire in the opposite direction, turning Odette into a swan and fully in possession of the sorcerer. Odette is in a cursed state that, under certain conditions—nighttime/moonlight and her body present within Rothbarth’s territory—allows her to have access to her un-cursed human form. In this window of freedom is that she met and fell in love with Friedine, perhaps in the course of several nights, several sneaky points of freedom. Yet, Rothbarth discovered their plans, spying on them, concealed in bird form—resembling a horned owl. Odile is, to some degree, also captive by this sorcerer, since he has promised her freedom from service if she succeeds in performing this task. However, she has much more agency than Odette, and she even delights in the task at hand, not out of malice but of a more complex pleasure of having the chance to take the form of a beautiful woman “I’ve never gotten to be pretty before! Sure, knights, wolves, lions and storms, but this-” (140),

she does not finish talking, the joy to enjoy her vision in the mirror, and the feel of her own hair, is greater.

Perhaps, the most marked difference of Odile's characters versus all the other embodied expressions of desire in these Sapphic-Queer tales is that she represents a fully grown woman, and that she fully enjoys the performance of it, she has nothing to lose and much—pleasure, freedom—to gain, so she gives it all in, delighting in the moment. She holds bodily and sensual wisdom that others do not or cannot have—given their particular circumstances. She is a shapeshifter, her lifeline is one of marvellous changes, and now she has the opportunity to embody something she desires to be, even if only to briefly (and intensely) experience. Even though, she does not love Friedine, nor is she attracted to her, she channels all her pleasure in her own current shape—as if she were still facing that mirror—she herself becomes an embodiment of desire—unlike identifying with the object of desire, actually becoming it, wearing it, and experiencing it from inside, an experience reinforced through the reactions of other surrounding objects. She is also a mirror herself, reflecting the desire of Friedine, the dance slowly escalates, until bringing their bodies as close as physically possible—the illustration shown (Fig. 20) is the climax of this scene. Odile's eyes intensely focused locked with Friedine's; Odile's hands are thrown in the air, out of sight, her torso pushed forward, fully oriented towards Friedine, as a teasing offering. Meanwhile Friedine's hand is stiff, almost like it is turning into a hungry claw. A tiny cloud of steam in-between them emerges as a visual signal of risen temperature. After this dance, Odile is now sober of desire and she finds herself melancholic, having a change of heart. She has compassion, she knows this situation is not fair for the other two women involved, she tries to warn Friedine in vain—she is far

too infatuated to listen. Rothbarth takes Odette all to himself, and here Odile becomes the vehicle to the resolution, now free to use her shapeshifting abilities at will, she transforms into the unicorn that Friedine rides to find Odette, and afterwards, she morphs into the magic sword that Odette uses to kill Rothbarth. A happy ending shows the two women back together in the background and Odile flying free, outside of the panel, bleeding into the gutter, as if she was about to leave the page, or the anthology itself (Fig. 22). She could easily stand as a triumphant symbol of queer desire, one that has not only queered but transcended its narrative, it is not tied to a past or to a future, nor to a single form or definition; it is a fluid and adaptable creature, loyal to authenticity. It has helped free others in the process of freeing itself.



(Fig. 22) Odile, the black swan, flying free.

In the first part (“Exploring a Grey-Area”) of this subsection of my analysis, I offered an example of tales that I categorised as belonging to a “Grey-Area”—i.e., those fairy-tales without overt Sapphic-Queer motifs or representations. I showed how the (possible) Sapphic-Queer motifs act as simultaneously disorienting and reorienting devices in the narrative; by using the audience’s heteronormative assumptions of gender

and power-play, this story is able to offer a queer twist by changing the roles of the characters involved and the meaning of key events. By contrast, in “Romantic Motives & Motifs,” I showed the function of the romantic motifs as primarily (re)orienting devices, not only because they are pivots of main happenings or conveyors of core meanings, but also because they are the ones that give a Queer-Sapphic sexuality to the characters, and some even link the tales to their ancient folk-tale origins. Finally, I have dedicated a larger subsection, “Visual Motif: Hands & Desire in Sapphic-Queer Tales,” to conceptualising hands as symbols and agents of Sapphic-Queer desire, a motif based on the pattern that emerged in my visual observations acquired from several of the 25 graphic narratives. I traced and read the appearance and relevance of this motif in the tales with most overt/recognisable representations of Sapphic-Queer desire.

Queer Feminism in the Main Themes

“A queer phenomenology might involve an orientation toward what slips, which allows what slips to pass through, in the unknowable length of its duration. In other words, a queer phenomenology would function as a disorientation device; it would not overcome the 'disalignment' of the horizontal and vertical axes, allowing the oblique to open up another angle on the world.” (Sara Ahmed, 2006, 172)

Challenges & Transformation

Valour, love,³⁰ and magic are the three sources of power most capable of transforming the characters and situations, as well as the means to overcome challenges in the fairy-tales here analysed. The more presence of magic a story has—be it in the form of magical characters, enchanted items or happenings—, the lesser the role that physical strength, wealth, and social status play as tools for these 25 heroines to overcome their challenges—at first glance, *slanted* or even contrary to the current physical reality in western societies, where having these elements often become key to people’s empowerment. In the major part of these stories, magical characters such as Witches, Fairies, or shapeshifters are often the game changers, capable of causing deep alterations to the lives of others who live in their worlds. They usually play the role of cunning trickster³¹ figures who hold a mysterious kind of knowledge/wisdom that the rest of the characters in the tale, and even the readers, do not—they are fluent in the emotional and symbolic language of fairy-tales: magic. They are skilled in dealing with and manipulating the wonders and horrors that abound in these tales. In other words, they are capable of manifesting queer phenomena at will (or even by accident), which in itself might make them the clearest embodiment of the queer heart of these wonder-tales. The queer power of these characters acts as a catalyst by unpredictably transforming themselves and what they come in contact with. They are not just the slants in Sara

³⁰ Further discussion on the topic of love in the next section “Romance & Sexuality.”

³¹ Tricksters are subversive characters’ whose intentions and alignments are often not easily readable because they follow their own hidden and/or cryptic desires within the narrative. In these fairy-tales, they are complex wild cards who do not fit neatly in pre-established categories—such as “goodness” or “evil.”

Ahmed's phenomenological mirrors, they are the queer hands that position and modify/bend the mirrors themselves, and maybe even the ones who may add more mirrors to the room to further multiply or distort the reflections to manifest the wonders/horrors. They (re)orient others through temporal queer disorientations, which may range from a kiss—as in “Sunkissed”—, to fortune-telling—as in the beginning of “Black Bull”—to cryptic spells/rituals that must be performed with very exact steps to follow, in which failure to comply produces further challenges—as is the case in “Bride of the Rose Beast,” where the Queen must choose one out of two magical roses to become pregnant with a child of her desired gender, yet she eats both and gives birth to twins, one of them is born as a Lindworm. These magically-induced (temporal) queer disorientations also happen as deceit—as in “Swan Lake,” when Odile transforms into Odette's shape to seduce Friedine—, but more commonly as curses. These curses always take those they befall on by surprise, and they always cause a radical change, usually as corporeal transformations. What can be more disorienting than having our bodies changed, when our bodies are our ways of perceiving the world, and the ways of being perceived in return by the world itself? Such a personal and forced transformation, a shattering of the ego (sense of self) and reformed into a strange—often bestial or monstrous, non-human—shape, is a most painful transgression—the reflection in the mirror is not only distorted beyond the point of recognisability, their humanity has been suddenly stripped away. And yet, within these stories this may turn into a strange blessing, for it offers a completely different experience the world; it takes the cursed characters' awareness besides themselves, from where they gain a new perspective and can reconsider and rebuild themselves—as mentioned before in the section titled “Wondrous (Dis)Orientations,” Sara Ahmed suggests that queer disorientations become

starting points from which wonder starts. It is via the journeys taken to break these curses that the afflicted characters, and sometimes their companions as well, grow as individuals, and/or as partners, and/or as members of their communities. Moreover, these powerfully queer magical beings are not omnipotent nor immune to the unexpected queer effects from the spells they perform; their own magic may disorient them when it gains a will of its own, and in turn teach them a lesson—as is the case of the lonely coral lily Witch in “The Glass Knight,” who creates a magical companion who she fully controls at first, but then gains a life of her own and teaches the witch about the importance of trust and personal independence in their relationship. Only desperate, yet valorous, characters actively come to these magical creatures—when they are unrelated to them—seeking for solutions to their otherwise impossible challenges, as they gauge less danger in making a pact or deal with them than to remain in their current unlivable circumstances—as in “Little Fish.” In other occasions, the heroines are sent to these magical creatures as a sacrifice—as in “Bride of the Rose Beast” or “Vasilisa”—but via their valour and resourcefulness, they transform the situations (and the magical beings) into their advantage, and resolve their seemingly impossible situations.

Several of the stories contain curses that came to happen to a character as a result of an irresponsible/abusive action of a third party. Such is the case in “Please,” where the prince’s brother stabs him in the back with a cursed sword out of greed, transforming the young prince into a big but fearful bear. Also, in “Swan Lake,” where the sorcerer Rothbarth abuses his power to keep Odile and Odette captive, the first by transforming her into a swan during the day, the second by keeping her shapeshifting abilities bound to

his service and will. Curses may also happen for an unknown reason as something that befell the characters in their past, as is the case of the Bull Woman in “Black Bull,” she was cursed sometime in her youth, no reason is given. In some of these cases, it is tempting to assume that the characters must have *deserved* the curse due to some sort of transgression they *may* have committed in the past; for example, in (2.18GAO) “Dragonslayers Not Permitted” by Jasmine Walls (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 168-179), the cursed character is a treasure-hoarding dragon, she has been turned into a maiden, and the condition to be transformed back into her dragon self is to be visited by an unselfish stranger. Thus, it can be assumed that her excessive greed was the reason of her curse, as is the case in many fairy-tales—including “The Laughing Queen” in these anthologies. However, some tales offer us a different perspective, one that disconnects the idea of curses as moralistic means for disciplinary punishments, and showing them more as unfortunate happenings, an example is the Ghost Girl in “Nautilus.” It is not clear exactly how or why she died and transformed into a ghost, the presence of her skeleton speaks for the long amount of time she has spent alone in the watery cave. Nonetheless, when we see how the Living Girl almost meets her end at the same lonely place, as a result of being targeted as victim and bullied by three boys, the tale gives us an understanding that sometimes terrible events such as these may happen not just out of unfortunate, but also out of unjust circumstances outside of an individual’s power. This is an important variation in western fairy-tales, not only because it breaks with the patriarchal fable-like moralising mold that swarms the genre—simultaneously opening up spaces for different and less judgmental stories to be told—also because this perspective helps question the meritocratic myth (“they must have done something to deserve it”) surrounding many situations of social (dis)advantage. Myth that, on one side, places unfair judgmental

pressure, as well as further challenge, on people who suffer difficult or terrible events in their lives; on the other side, it does not invite privileged people to question their fortunate circumstances, and instead leads them to believe that they deserve what they have, regardless of how they came to have it or how it came to happen to them, aiding in perpetuating social inequalities.³²

Other challenges in these stories are quite physical, and in the absence of magic, and require of a lot of valour, cooperation and perseverance to be overcome. Such is the case in (2.04GA) "*Maleen*" by Nicole Chartrand (*Valor 2: Wands*, 37-49) where there is an impending war between two tyrant Kings and their kingdoms. Their respective children, Princess Maleen and a nameless Prince, were conspiring to marry and overthrow their fathers' reign in order to prevent the war and save both kingdoms. But, Maleen's father discovered her plans and imprisoned her together with her right-hand, the female captain of her guard, in a floating fortress. The two women remained imprisoned together for several years until their resources dwindled, and they found a way to bring the entire fortress down and escape. When they returned to the world, with great sorrow they saw the devastation that resulted from the war. However, they learnt to survive together, they eventually found and brought together the rest of the survivors from the former two kingdoms, and forged a new prosperous, diverse, and peaceful community, even welcoming the former Prince in their midst, who also managed to survive and eventually find them. This is perhaps the less magical of the stories, even though some sort of power crystals are what keep the floating fortress going, neither the two women

³² For a sociological study of meritocracy as plutocracy, or the government of the wealthiest, refer to Littler, Jo. *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power, and Myths of Mobility*. London: Routledge, 2018.

nor the prince rely on any magical elements to solve their challenges. On the contrary, the two women must destroy together the magical heart of the fortress to bring it down to earth, and it is through their mutual cooperation, their love for their people, their leadership and perseverance that they manage to survive and help others organise and thrive as well, as a community.

Family & Community

Most of these 25 tales deal with quite lonely situations. In at least half of these stories the heroine does have a family, nonetheless in most of the stories the family is not close, or they are the source of the challenges for the heroine. In “Little Fish,” the mermaid leaves her home in the first place because of the neglect, coldness, and even rejection she experiences from her family and community, she longs to be loved and to be allowed to love. She is the only affectionate mermaid and her family shuns her for it, so she does not identify with her peers, she longs to be something *other*, to belong elsewhere.

Sometimes mothers are entirely absent and the father figures become the source of struggle for the daughter.³³ In “All Furs” Samantha’s mother dies when she is a child and she is mostly neglected by her father, until she becomes a young woman, so much in the likeness of her beautiful deceased mother. Then, his attention turn towards her with

³³ The only positive paternal figures in these tales are the generous Papa and the guiding Godfather of Marie in “Marie and the Nutcracker.” It is unclear whether Marie and her brother have a mother or not, or if the Godfather lives with them and is perhaps a second parent to them.

incestuous intent, and he attempts to marry her. She refuses and gives him 4 impossible tasks to solve in order to give her consent, hoping he will not be able to accomplish them—to make her a mantle with the furs of all the animals in the kingdom, and 3 dresses, one made of sunlight, the second of the night sky, and the third made of a forest. However, her father is well connected and a Fairy-Godmother's magic helps him. When Samantha receives all four finished pieces of clothing, knowing that she is now forced to keep her word and consent, she escapes and renounces her identity and even her place in human society, disappearing under the many animal skins and becoming a creature in-between human and non-human. In "The Steadfast Tin Automaton," Hilde and Coppelia are two of many different Automata created by an inventor named Hoffman, a rather absent and neglectful father figure; utilitarian even, because it does not matter to him that all of his mechanical children/creations are quite (magically) alive and aware, he sees them as mere tools and objects; even though he seems to have given them the ability for human and artistic expression, he values more how they can be tweaked and sold to the highest bidder—the military, who wants mainly Coppelia, the most human-like of the Automata, as an undercover war machine. Hilde and Coppelia are further objectified in different ways throughout the tale. Hilde is hefty and somewhat rusted and stiff, she was built as a soldier and war machine for the Great War, made as one in a series of many Automata with uniform appearance and programming—not entirely unlike the ways in which many youth have been historically raised for war in diverse cultures. After the war ended, she was hurt (her knee) but still functional; the young men soldiers who survived hailed her as their Minerva³⁴ and wanted to honour her great service, yet had to sell her to

³⁴ Minerva is a virgin Roman war Goddess, likened and merged to the Greek Goddess Athena. Unlike her half-brother, war God Mars (Greek Ares), who is a bloodthirsty symbol, she is linked to defensive

the theatre out of financial need. Many years passed, she was kept in her box, alone, at the back of the theatre; rarely used as background prop in the stage, and sometimes visited by a kind old man who respected and felt sympathy for her—he is the only one who sees her as more human-like, but not merely by her humanoid shape, also because she is something he can respect, a war symbol. He is the theatre keeper, and often comes to open the lid of her box and talk to her, and she listens and thinks but does not talk back, she keeps herself still, almost in a state of hibernation, she does not show much desire to interact with anyone nor to leave her box. There are other Automata in the theatre, made by the same man, most of them made specifically for the entertainment business. They act as a stage family to each other, a troupe, but ostracise her whenever she is their midst—by actions such as whispering at each other in her presence, or even making backhanded compliments—, this is the opposite reaction they have to Coppelia, whose good favour they desire by virtue of her being the most skilled and beautiful dancer/performer. The troupe is afraid of Hilde’s strength and bellicose past, and they focus on how different she is to them. On the other hand, the newest Automaton model, Coppelia, is made to be a graceful ballerina, meant to entertain and interact with people, a cultural—even sexual—object. There is a moment in the tale in which Coppelia tells Hilde of her life before arriving to the theatre, when she used to live with their “Father”

war and, overtime, came to represent so *many* more concepts, such as wisdom, strategy, practical insight, justice, skill, law, civilisation, bravery, heroism, even arts and poetry. She did not have an average birth, there are several versions, yet in all of them she is the product of Jupiter’s (Greek Zeus) rape of the titaness Metis (wisdom, skill), whom he swallows whole while still pregnant, fearing that she would give birth to a male heir who could grow to overthrow his power. Metis gives birth to Minerva inside Jupiter, and they both continue to live inside him. Metis raises Minerva and trains her to defend herself, she even forges her a set of armour. In one version, they live in Jupiter’s head, all their activity causes him agonising pain until his forehead breaks open, from where Minerva experiences a second birth, this time fully mature, strong, sword in hand and clad in battle armour—some versions illustrate this as her only birth, eliminating Metis from the story. “Minerva.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., n.d. Web. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Minerva-Roman-Goddess>)

(Hoffman) at the university. She cannot remember much of this time, but she remembers a young man who sometimes worked for her father there, and who might have thought she was human, as he would visit her. She would not say what happened during these visits, but it prompts Hilde to ask her if this bothered her, to which she replied laughing “I didn’t know what being bothered was! [...] But he bothered my father. ‘You do not have time for such things,’ Father would say to me. Then one day the student... stopped” (*Valor: Swords*, 111-112). When Hilde asks her if that means he stopped visiting her, Coppelia only replies that he just stopped and then abruptly changes the topic, momentarily confusing Hilde and signalling her discomfort with continuing to inhabit and tell the memory. This gap is important because it gives space to many possible interpretations, a hint of sexual assault or a range of other uncomfortable interactions that are hard to talk about but relatable to a female (or feminised) audience—it could even hint at victim blaming, for the reaction of the father towards her, or at the murder of a young man in the hands of a jealous father, as Death is the greatest form of stopping someone or oneself. These two Automata have had completely different experiences of their father—who could stand as a symbol of patriarchy in this story—and of young men around them in the forming years of their lives, and this has been dependant on the kind of object they are read as being, as well as the kind of object they have been *made* to be and function as. Coppelia is terrified to be sold and go to war, Hilde holds her and attempts to comfort her by saying “You would be surprised how seldom men will check inside a box” (112), because this is her lived experience, but very likely for Coppelia this would not be the case, as she is made to be a (gendered) beautiful focus of attention and desire. Finally, in "Bride of the Rose Beast," Kari is the only daughter of a humble shepherd; he is either convinced or coerced by the King to give her away as a sacrificial

bride to the Lindworm, the cursed form of Princess Roza, who was born in this monstrous form because of a mistake her Queen mother made. In this story, the King and the Queen needed an heir to their kingdom but had been unable to conceive a child. The afflicted Queen went into the forest to cry her sadness, and here she was approached by a wise old woman. The wise woman gave her a very specific ritual to follow to solve her problem: she was to place a double-handled cup upside-down at the north-western corner of her royal garden, and leave it there overnight, then come at dawn to find that two perfect rose-buds had grown in that spot. She had to choose only one of those roses to eat, the red one if she wanted a male child, the white one if she wanted a female child. However, the wise old woman also warned her not to eat both, as she would have horrible consequences. At first she had only eaten the white one, very hopeful to have a daughter of her own, but the taste was so delicious she devoured the red one as well, cursing her first child. This is the only instance in these stories in which the curse is caused/given by the mother. Later, when Roza is saved from her curse by Kari, with a form of stern discipline and a caring embrace, one is left wondering that perhaps the Queen could have broken the curse on her daughter herself if she had chosen to accept, guide, and love her as she was, regardless of her initial appearance.

Sometimes the mother is there at the beginning of a story but dies soon after, leaving her daughter vulnerable, as in “Eggchild” where Zahra and her mother live in extreme poverty,³⁵ barely surviving. One day, Zahra’s mother comes across a great nest

³⁵ This is the only tale that deals with the topic of the struggles of extreme poverty, most of the other heroines live in more stable situations, even “All Furs,” who lives as a beastly creature in the forest, does not lack food or shelter.

with two beautiful eggs; she takes them one by one and cooks them for herself and Zahra. Zahra is concerned because, even though she is quite young, she is aware they killed another creature's children to survive. A female Gryphon, the mother of the broken/eaten eggs, finds Zahra's mother and murders her in cold revenge one day as she is out scavenging. Zahra, vulnerable and alone, begins to starve, until she resolves that she would at least try to avenge her mother before dying. Eventually, she finds the Gryphon, and the Gryphon recognises her as the daughter of the woman she murdered. Instead of attempting to kill each other and continuing the line of revenge, they realise they are connected by emptiness left behind in their lives, and they adopt each other as their new family—as a simultaneous atonement and blessing for each other. This ending offers a queer possible configuration of kinship, one in which, instead of perpetuating violence—based on their differences and/or on retribution for the pain they have inflicted on each other—, two creatures of different species forge a forgiving and collaborative alliance of love to survive and to enhance their mutual quality of life. Love and grief interplay as connectors in their queer union, since they ease the recognition of how fitting they are for fulfilling each other's needs, their losses are perfectly inverse and it causes a shift of identities—how they perceive themselves individually and how they perceived each other. They do not see each other simply as murderous monsters when they realise the personal contexts in which the actions were taken, even less when they realise how the consequences have transformed their realities. Now Zahra is a motherless child who cannot survive on her own, and the Gryphon a childless mother who just lost her unborn children. Their losses have taken them outside of themselves and directly into each other, bridging their polarity through a radical act of forgiveness and reconciliation. Of course, this is a fairy-tale and they have gone through the complex process of reconciliation in

one magical step,³⁶ however narratives of reconciliation, no matter how magical, are essential to begin opening conversations and possibilities for dialogue in order to balance the excesses of violence and the polarisation.

In other cases, the family exists more in the background of the life of the heroine, as in “Nautilus,” where a girl is the only child of a mother and a father that are somewhat distant and unable to connect with her. She spends most of her time alone, not quite connecting with other members of her community either. It is unclear whether her parents know, or care, about the challenges in the life of their daughter—evidence points to the contrary, as she is the target of bullying at the hands of three boys, twice, and almost dies because of it. They show some concern when she tries to introduce her new best friend to them, a ghost girl that they cannot see, but they take no action. She eventually moves out and they disappear entirely from the picture, and so do most of the community members as well. Her family becomes the ghost girl, she protects her from the last attack by the three bullies, showing that even though others cannot see her, she has quite real and physical effects.

Sometimes families and communities are shown as stable and supportive, as in “The Laughing Queen,” where a huntress is an important and valued member of her tribe, and her mother is alive and protective of her. They have a close relationship; she offers

³⁶ The Reconciliation Pyramid proposed by Dr. Yehudith Auerbach has at least 7 steps in it, the first one being Narrative Incorporation, for which stories like this could prove useful; the other six steps being Apology, Responsibility, Restitution, Empathy, Acknowledgment, and Acquaintance. Auerbach, Yehudith. “The Reconciliation Pyramid: A Narrative-Based Framework for Analyzing Identity Conflicts.” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2009, pp. 291-318.

advice and warns her of dangers—such as the greedy Laughing Queen. When the heroine meets the Laughing Queen—who was previously cursed and exiled from her community for her greed—, even though she has been warned by her mother that she could be taken advantage of, she is still kind and generous. The Laughing Queen grows stronger and bigger every time she is fed by the huntress, but instead of abusing of her generosity, she repays it by protecting her against a hungry pack of hyenas. Having proven her virtue and good will, the huntress invites the Laughing Queen to her tribe. The tribe are somewhat defensive at the beginning, but trust the judgment of the huntress and feel respect for the Laughing Queen’s good deed—saving a valuable member of their group. By giving the Laughing Queen a chance, they gain yet another valuable member—no less than the most skilled huntress in the land—, and through this, and through the bond she has forged with the huntress, the Laughing Queen breaks her curse and regains her humanity. She is no longer seen as a greedy egocentric beast, and she has learned to use her strength and talent to be of service to others, as well as to be more aware how her individual actions affect others around her. Perhaps eventually she might learn as well what it means to be part of a community, and the importance of cooperation to human thriving and survival. This lesson is an important piece of wisdom against egoistic attitudes such as the toxic hyper-individualism that has manifested in the recent years in North-American culture (particularly in the United States); it is reinforced by capitalistic values (such as self-reliance, self-determination, and competition) that exalt the rights of the individuals over the needs of the community, as well as the needs of the self over the needs of others, and it fails to promote trust, empathy, equality, and other collective human values—particularly relevant for crises situations such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, where

cooperation and taking care of one another are crucial to save lives.³⁷ For a community or a society to function, thrive and survive, it is paramount to keep a balance between the needs of the self and needs of others, as well as a balance in the individual and the collective (group, community) social needs.

Romance & Sexuality

Actions performed from a place of valour, love, kindness, and/or compassion are often a powerful means to help a receptive another with their challenges; in doing so, the heroine overcomes her own challenges as well, and the tendency in this path is that they over time discover/breed a desire for one another—this is a common theme in many of the tales chosen for this project, though it presents in different forms and degrees, as has been discussed in the previous section “Sapphic-Queer (Re)Orientations.” Queer sexual and/or sensual desire is often portrayed as a natural consequence of these actions of valour, love, kindness, and compassion—an unexpected and very welcome reward for the parties involved. Contrary to the romantic myth of love at first sight, most of the romantic Sapphic-Queer attractions in these stories happen over-time, as other events unfold, and not suddenly, nor are they dependent solely on the characters physically (attractive) traits. The only story where the cliché of love at first sight seems to occur is in “Swan Lake,”

³⁷ In a recent study that analysed the data of 69 different countries Dr. Yossi Maaravi et al. found that, unsurprisingly “the more individualistic (vs. collectivistic) a country was, the more COVID-19 cases and mortalities it had. We also found that the more individualistic participants were, the higher the chances they would not adhere to epidemic prevention measures.” Maaravi, Yossi et al. “The Tragedy of the Commons: How Individualism and Collectivism Affected the Spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Frontiers in Public Health*, Vol. 9, 2021, Web. (<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2021.627559/>)

and this is only because the story starts after the main characters (Queen Odette and Princess Friedine) have already met, fallen in love, and decided to marry one another in the soon future, only a few panels illustrate this, making it seem instantaneous. Regarding beauty, characters are seldom described with possessing it, diminishing the exaggerated importance that the traditional fairy-tale places as a rule to the value of women. Instead, it is left for open interpretation in most tales, and it is to intuit that it resides not only in the eye of the beholder, but in their virtues as well. When the Nutcracker first appears in doll form, as a gift from the Godfather to Marie and her brother Fritz, in “Marie and the Nutcracker,” she is described as “ugly” by Fritz. Nonetheless, this judgment happens right after Fritz is disappointed to be corrected by his Godfather that this Nutcracker doll, unlike traditional Nutcrackers, is a girl. Fritz entire utterance is: “How can it be a girl? She’s so ugly...” (*Valor 2: Wands*, 1998, 54). This stands as an illustration of the constriction of female beauty to traditional notions of femininity from a patriarchal perspective, where androgynous and more masculine-presenting females are deemed as less desirable/interesting/attractive. However, the Nutcracker’s gender and gender presentation has the opposite effect on Marie, she is joyous and intrigued, and she wants the Nutcracker. To Marie, her dolls are not just objects, they are alive to her, she bonds with them, she protects them, and they talk back to her, and feel emotions with her—only with her, no one else hears voices or sees any movement from the dolls, only she has these experiences with them, created perhaps as projections of her youthful desires. Only her Godfather the doll-maker, an androgynous old man, seems to have a magical and queer complicity with her; it is a ghost in his shape who brings the magic at night that transforms all the toys into living beings, and that makes Marie small enough to fight alongside with them against the Mouse-King and his mice army, as well as to fit inside

the toy palace that he had created, where Marie and her Nutcracker have their first dance together. It is also him who, at the end of the tale, appears first when a distressed Marie cannot find her beloved Nutcracker amongst her dolls; he meets Marie and brings in his mysterious niece, who has a striking resemblance to the Nutcracker doll—hinting at him having transformed her into a human, so that she and Marie can be together. The tale “Black Bull” has another possible awkward reading of a woman’s gender by others (informed by the patriarchal gaze/filter); the Bull Woman has her human form only inside the home of her mother, and in it she has a feminine aspect. However, because of a curse that befell her in her youth for unknown reasons, she is turned into a bull outside of her mother’s cottage. This could stand as a metaphor of her being perceived as an unfeminine beast for the mere fact of leaving her mother’s home, the place where the gender role of “woman” has been traditionally confined into for centuries and across cultures. The figure of a bull, an indication that her strong and free spirit, or perhaps appearance—maybe even a reflection of how her sexuality is perceived by others—cannot be read as human-like nor woman-like outside, in the public space, precisely because of how constrict the definition of womanhood might be in the world/context that she inhabits.

The only tale in which love is an expressed requirement as a countercurse is “Little Fish,” perhaps this is due to this being what the mermaid longs to have the most. As the mermaid grows, the only love she knows is the one in the fairy-tales she reads, with pictures of royal humans who marry out of “true love” and live “happily ever after,” and she seeks to emulate this. This illustrates the danger that feminists like Karen Rowe have been pointing out and criticising since the 1970s, how the trend of fairy-tales “which

glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as heroine's cardinal virtues" act as "powerful transmitters of romantic myths which encourage women to internalise only aspirations deemed appropriate to our 'real' sexual functions within patriarchy" (Hallett et al. 2009, 344). By growing with only this type of fairy-tales, the affection-starved Little Fish has fallen prey for the romantic myths of the Prince Charming and the "happily ever after"—i.e., the magical solution to all her emotional and personal needs—that comes right after meeting and marrying him. In her ignorance and sorrow, this seems like not only the ideal but the *only* solution for her,³⁸ since keeping her newly-gained humanity and her very life depend on gaining the love of a human. Through this limited knowledge she develops a tunnel-vision focused on the prince, as if there were no other humans to love her, or no other valid forms of human love that she could gain or exercise herself, such as the love of the self—she did become human after all, maybe she could have broken her own curse—or the love of a family or of a community. In a way, by offering an illustration of these romantic myths and not confirming them, the tale challenges them to a certain degree. She did not need the prince nor a wedding to save herself from certain doom; at the end, the prince's queer servant's love more than sufficed, a love that developed and grew over time, through knowing each other on a daily basis in kind and genuine reciprocal acts. The Little Fish also (l)earned the love of a good community in the rest of the castle's servants, by virtue of who she was, by herself and with them, not just by her looks.

³⁸ This is an illustration, within the tale, of how fairy-tales have been many times used as a patriarchal device to install these and other romantic myths in service of compulsory heterosexuality—meaning that, in their imparted ideology, the existence of romantic relationships is constricted to exist *only* in the form of monogamous female-male couplings, with the interest of sexual reproduction, rendering other forms of romance or sexuality invisible or seemingly impossible or unavailable. Adrienne Rich famously critiqued and brought attention to this concept in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980).

The Lindworm, or Princess Roza, in “Bride of the Rose Beast” is aware of her desire for women, and she is also the only cursed character and who fully embodies her bestiality in a voracious and destructive way, very likely due to her draconian and greedy condition, reinforced by not being shown any human love or compassion throughout her life. Her mother the Queen, and even the Midwife who helped the delivery, recoiled at the sight of her pale small non-human body; right after this, the Queen commanded the Midwife to dispose of the Lindworm and keep her existence a secret. The Midwife throws the newborn Lindworm out of the tower’s window, into the wilderness that surrounds the castle, leaving her for dead. Unbeknownst to them, the Lindworm survives throughout the years, her now cruel and entitled character forged by the abandonment and by the wilderness where she has lived and developed. This experience has reinforced the depth and intensity of her desires as well; she wants all which she was denied since birth, and more. As the first born, she has come back and demanded to have a bride for herself, before her twin brother can have one; she then devours two brides whole, insatiable and forbidding her brother from having a bride, and the family to continue the royal line. Her third bride, Kari, is not afraid of her and has confronted her directly, performing a ritual just as intense as Roza’s desire and vitality in their wedding night as a means to strip her from her monstrous outer layers. Then, Kari is to hold Roza’s exposed and sore body with the compassion, tenderness, and care that the latter has never known. This act transforms Roza from a Lindworm into a human, the being that she was supposed to be born as from the beginning, but lacked the acceptance, guidance, and knowledge to (re)connect with (and learn to be) her better self—as well as to channel her bestial desires

in a mutually consenting way that would not transgress others' boundaries and/or rob someone else of their life force. The other three female characters who are aware of—and actively pursue—their desire for women, are the coral lily Witch from “The Glass Knight,” as she creates her companion in the exact shape of her desire; the She-Wolf from “The Promise,” who romantically pursues Reinnette and directly proposes her to be lovers; and Jennet from “Song Without End,” who invites the fairy Primrose into a romantic relationship with her and Tam Lin.

The only two tales in which love and compassion are absent, and where social status and wealth are at the centre instead, are “Crane Wife,” a tale of retribution—where love might have existed in the distant past, but an ambitious desire for power took its place—, and “The Dragon Princess,” a tale of greed and the possession of another through power and forced marriage. This story illustrates an action (forced marriage) often performed in patriarchal societies from paternal authoritative figures to women and girls, yet in this case it is a young woman who objectifies and possesses another young woman who is less powerful than her—she is a knight in her service. The Dragon Princess turns the female knight into another prized possession in her greedy collection of beautiful and good things from the world. The Dragon Princess is not an actual dragon, she is a human young woman with an insatiable greed; she has had everything she could possibly want and more, it is her enormous privilege alone that has encouraged the growth of her desires, who are the draconian force in the story—she does not just want things that others can have, she wants them for herself alone, as an example, she recounts how when she was a child she would cut every single flower in the gardens to have their

beauty in her room, for no one else to enjoy, no matter if they died sooner this way. By marrying the female knight against her wishes, she was metaphorically swallowed her whole, stealing the direction of the knight's life and desire, towards herself alone, and removing the knight's possibility of materialising her valiant dreams, as a knight. And yet, this time the Dragon Princess has taken a human life into her hands, which made her reflect and become self-aware of her draconian greed. This is a fairy-tale after all, this could be the first step for her to break this pattern, and this new shared destiny could force her to look through the perspective of another. Moreover, by marrying the knight she has given her the status of Queen as well—same as hers, the highest in the land—unintentionally empowering her and opening a new world of different possibilities for both, which might not be too far after all from the knight's wishes, as the Dragon Princess narrates: “Even when we first met, she already wanted to be more than just a knight” (*Valor 2: Wands*, 2018, 205). In “Maleen” marriage is shown as a tool of power as well, not of possession, but as an attempt to overthrow the tyrannical patriarchal forces of two neighbouring kingdoms that are being dragged into reckless war and destruction—in other words, marriage as a tool to generate political peace between two rivalling kingdoms. Yet, in this story it backfires trying to use the tools of patriarchy against itself, and Maleen ends up thrown and jailed in a floating fortress along with her closest ally, her trusted Guard Captain.

Within this subsection of the analysis, “Queer Feminism in the Main Themes,” I have addressed more directly issues raised by intersectional theory of Queer Feminism in the three main contextual themes at the centre of this thesis: Challenges &

Transformation, Family & Community, and Romance & Sexuality. My aim was to demonstrate, in each of these areas, the values that inhere in these tales, to offer a fuller understanding of the environments in which these fairy-tales (and their motifs) develop, to better understand the imagined worlds that these tales of wonder portray, and to draw a few relevant comparison between them and our current physical, and historical, reality.

Chapter V: Conclusion

"Everything is held together with stories. That is all that is holding us together, stories and compassion."—Barry Lopez

In the present project I embarked on an explorative journey towards the crossroads centre where queerness, feminism, graphic narratives, and fairy-tales meet, because, even though many works continue to emerge in this area, it is a place that has not received much academic attention, and my intention has been to contribute to this sparse body of literature. This thesis contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship on fairy-tales; the academic fields it adds to include literature studies, visual studies, feminist and women and gender studies, sexuality studies, queer theory, and cultural studies. I started this project with three main concerns. The first was whether these graphic narratives can still be recognised as fairy-tales or not. The answer to that question is yes. They are all in short story format with recognisable folkloric paradigm-making functions, they all contain at least one important magical motif, and they all deliver a happy and/or hopeful resolution—all of which are core characteristics of the fairy-tale genre. As anticipated,

the inclusion of illustrations achieved a more integral artistic expression and representation of narrative and, particularly, of emotions. However, this project did not delve deeply in, for example, an aesthetic nor psychological study that could explore more carefully the intricacies of these successes, and I suspect works such as these graphic narratives would greatly benefit from being explored from these angles—especially under a queer and (intersectional) feminist lens—given that this is a collective work of art realised by many young comic artists and illustrators, which resulted in a great variety of skill and diversity of cultural representations that heighten the enchanting allure that these fairy-tales already have.

My second interest has been to observe what elements of Sapphic-Queer love and desire are brought into focus in these all-ages fairy-tales, as well as to analyse how these elements manifest—this became the heart and soul of this project. For this endeavour, Sara Ahmed’s theory of *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) guided me through a series of readings to understand, from a phenomenological perspective, the mappings and manifestations of Sapphic-Queer love and desire in these wonder tales. Observing through this lens allowed for experiencing and observing the romantic happenings in an imaginary queer plane, focusing on Sapphic-Queer desire as the phenomenon to be studied, understanding its directions, the cumulative points that create the organic lines that connect the objects of such desire amongst themselves, as well as understanding what gives them their orientations in the narratives. This theory resulted quite useful for (among other things) conceptualising hands as queer objects, even agents, of desire—an interesting trend in several of the graphic narratives—, as well as to read the movements of such queer objects and the happenings around them. In hindsight, perhaps the greatest

potential of *Queer Phenomenology* would be found in doing in-depth readings of individual tales, since it does require attention to elements and details for a better exploration of particular happenings.

Not surprisingly, given the fantastic quality of this genre and the intended audience, the overt representations of Sapphic-Queer love and desire are often romantic; however, the stories themselves are not over-focused in romance itself. For instance, unlike many classical fairy-tales, in most of these stories marriage is not an ultimate goal for the heroines nor was it a priority to obtain a romantic partner; instead, love and desire just comes to being, and they develop—or are discovered—as a consequence of fortuitous journeys taken together. These queer discoveries and awakenings to Sapphic-Queer love and desire are not portrayed in a tragic or traumatic light by virtue of them being queer, nor do they start attached to any sort of pre-established (sexual) orientations; on the contrary, the queer attractions amongst the heroines and other characters they flow naturally, even pleasantly, with their narratives; they are not met with hesitation or punishment, instead they are intuitively understood and even celebrated. However, the younger the heroines are, the less overt the romantic representations are as well. This resulted in some of these representations being more discreetly placed in strategic moments to make obvious the nature (even the fluid transformation) of the relationship between two characters, or to designate some performed actions as romantic in nature as well (e.g., a kiss, a gift, a facial expression), as opposed to them being gestures of a friendship without desire. These strategic placings were sometimes necessary symbols for these actions to be recognised as Sapphic-Queer at all, in part given to the invisibility that historically has haunted Sapphic relationships, as well as due to the quite limited

illustrations of sexuality—even less of eroticism—culturally allowed in published all-ages visual works—some of the characters themselves were tweens or youth. One of the ways in which I found that the illustrators navigated this tactical romantic symbology was through the actions and panel close-ups of hands as tools (and agents) of desire; if, for example, two girls held hands in an intimate interpersonal moment (such as reading a story together), a close-up panel would follow to bring attention towards that action again, beckoning to not overlook it, hinting that something *more* is happening in the union of those two hands—this would usually not be necessary if one of the girls were (for example) a boy in the same intimate scenario, the same close-up would function as a romantic decoration or enhancer. I consider these strategic placings of the queer aesthetics in these romantic happenings a push against the compulsory heterosexuality’s shadow that is still in our present. Even though their push is at times rather gentle, it is this subtlety and visual beauty which allow them to open their Sapphic-Queer spaces with more ease in printed all-ages literature. These anthologies, in general, do not rely on any shock factors to deliver their narratives or the messages within them; they rely on beauty, magic, love, and various representations of various human virtues and vices. Romantic was not the only form of love/desire in these stories, they also contained Sapphic-Queer shapes of compassion, kindness, queer kinships (interspecies alliances, paranormal bondings), transformations, jealous possessions and belongings, and more.

It could be argued that these narratives stand as examples for visions of queer utopias. Although, this would have been a pleonasm to José Esteban Muñoz who, in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), considered queerness—as an ideology and its performance—to be an utopia in itself, a (hopeful and

ever-shifting) place to aim to reach in the horizon of the future, yet never quite reachable. Inside these tales, you *can* have a taste of the promised ecstasy in such (im)possibilities. (Im)Possibilities because while their magic seems quite ethereal and unreachable compared to physical reality, the queer happenings of desire coexisting harmonically (and in loving acceptance) within the worlds they occur in are more material and attainable. Even if (or perhaps *especially* because) such realities are more far off in the horizon for certain groups and individuals in different geopolitical situations and spaces, these optimistic dreamscapes and their “queer aesthetics” are not merely escapes for the present, they “map future social relations” in “blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity,” tools through which we imagine in order to “enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (1). Their narratives help counter the antiutopian and pessimistic forces (political and otherwise) that drain out the feelings of joy and wonder of living in the modern world—particularly draining for dissident, queer, or subaltern individuals and groups who are often at the receiving end of these painful discourses. I agree with José Esteban Muñoz that taking seriously the pleasurable feelings of queerness and its utopia, as well as the creation of a methodology of critical hope, would open up a completely different and renewed angle through which to experience and (re)make the world. It is important to bring our minds and hearts together to feel, imagine, and create critical methodologies of hope, love, compassion, harmony, and reconciliation to counter the damages historically caused by patriarchal polarising systems, as well as to remove the patriarchal stigma of naïveté attached to these terms, to tell stories of connection, of worlds where people are not merely tools of profit, production, and gain, but valued individuals, part of functioning and wholistic societies—which do not destroy each other nor the world that they exist in. And yet, even

these fairy-tales are not quite *there* yet, they are gentle glimpses of pleasant beginnings; they are magical windows that gently show us possible queer transformations that are organic, fluid, pleasurable, joyful. The utopian visions in these fairy-tales are gendered as well, they place an emphasis on female subjects, for which visions of matriarchal worlds, or worlds where there is a female or feminised majority abounded.

Finally, my third concern has been understanding what gendered dis/empowerings do these tales offer to (primarily) queer girls and women. By highlighting valour, love, and magic as valuable sources of power, the messages of these tales hint towards exercising essential inner strengths, skills and human qualities—bravery, resilience, compassion, intuition, listening to one's emotions, learning to understand one's and other's needs, cooperation, forgiveness—that could empower their readers in psychological and spiritual ways; they could achieve this empowering by passing these values to individuals and offering them as tools for self-determination and even emotional healing—some include potential for teaching about social healing as well; as Clarissa Pinkola Estés puts it "[s]tories are medicine. I have been taken with stories since I heard my first. They have such power, they do not require that we do, be, act anything—we need only listen. The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories. Stories engender the excitement, sadness, questions, longings, and understandings." (1997, 18). However, these fairy-tales do extend an invitation to their readers to exercise the virtues in them imparted, since only having or knowing about these values, skills or tools is not enough; one must take action in order for them to have any lasting effects (in the stories as in the real-world). Most of the queer heroines do not solve their challenges by merely having (or being) something or someone,

they must actively find resourceful and creative ways to implement or develop their skills and tools, whether it is in magical or in physical ways, or a mix of both. Thus, these heroines are not passively waiting to be saved; the majority of them use said skills and tools to fend for themselves and for others, to build communities as well as to build themselves as individuals. Similarly, these fairy-tales are not feminism only by having and featuring female-lead stories, these values stand as proof that they have moved away from many disempowering stereotypes in gender representation. Also, their diversity is significant not just because of the variety of styles and stories offered by their creators in these anthologies, but by the various cultural and racial visions they offer—often in direct connection to their creators/creatixes’ backgrounds. In regards of gender itself, even though it is clear that all the heroines are female—given that this is one of the main characteristics of the anthologies themselves—, and that the majority of them fall more into the recognisable feminine, they also offer a good variety of gender representation that depicts other possible ways of embodying femaleness that could be deemed as more androgynous or even masculine. However, this is still a gentle push as only a few of the characters intentionally push beyond the boundaries of a more traditional femininity—western or eastern. It is also unclear whether any of the female protagonists are transgender as none of their stories explicitly allude to this—the only obvious exception being the one transmasculine secondary character in “Little Fish.”

In general, fairy-tales remain quite relevant in modern global cultures, they are still chosen vehicles for the transmission of our ideas and desires in a way that exercises the emotional and the intuitive sides of our psyche. Even though they present narrative in its

most basic form, they are full of meaning and complexity in their contents, and they easily morph and adapt to the mythologies that we continue to circulate and (re)create—may they be ancient or modern. Their popularity points towards our hunger for wonder, for creative expression, for emotional identification, for virtual guidance and delicious queer disorientations. They talk in the language of desires and dreams, of the symbolic and surreal. Their happy endings offer us satisfaction and hope, and they also speak of our societal values. The two fairy-tale anthologies discuss in this thesis offer clear examples of how this genre has evolved, and how it continues to evolve; these are stories about how we live in the flesh, and ones we dream of living. The creative variety they of these 48 tales is expansive for the heart and for the mind, and has been quite useful for this project. The graphic part of them has greatly enhanced its variety, as it has allowed every creator/creatix to further personalise and fill with meaning and life their stories and the characters that exist in them. Every element, visual or narrative, is full of intention, especially given the shortness of this format. The very fact that they have brought to focus female genders and some queer genders makes it a simultaneously feminist and queer project in its own right; albeit not a radical one, but one that has achieved good reach and popularity, and one that helps fill a social need for representation, and a cultural gap. The heroines here portrayed are indeed valiant, and alive, they have come a long way from the problematic Disney representations that Kay Stone, Karen Rowe, and others brought to our attention; it is marvellous to see how the concepts of different female genders³⁹ are evolving in the collective conscious, and how the variety and depth

³⁹ Here I am using “female” as a biological sexual category and “gender” as a psychosocial construct existing inside and outside the traditional categories (and roles) of, for example, the “feminine” and the “masculine,” or “girl” and “woman;” by using gender in its plural (genders) I am signalling towards the greater diversity of psychosocial understandings, and embodiments of such

in the stories told bring many more questions and possibilities for us to explore. Dichotomies are still an important tool for making sense of contrasts and differences, or for adding a certain romantic spice to possible forms of relationships—hunter/prey, owner/owned, creator/creature—but these stories do not merely stay there, even in their small formats they have managed to bring further complexity to their characters.

Fairy-tales and, in Sara Ahmed's terms, the *disorientations* they bring—whether they are as wonders or as horrors, or somewhere in-between—compel us to pay attention and consider. These disorientations bring their own kind of pleasures when taking us by surprise and leading us far away, even if only while they last, from what is normative and expected. These fantastical tales also give us a semblance of stability via their orientation towards a resolution that always provides pleasure and happiness—which may even take us out of our own daily horrors and wonders, as a means to appreciate them with renewed eyes, maybe even offering/teaching us moments of hindsight. Magic is at the heart of fairy-tales, it makes them what they are, the mysteriously whimsical enchantments that resist any logical explanation; yet they make perfect sense within their own worlds, and in the emotions they spark in us with their unstable and wonderful alchemy. Naturally, if one chooses to give into its charms, this genre can awaken a curious urge in the manner in which it communicates directly to our intuition, and our desires, through its symbolism—what they mean to us, how they connect with us on a personal level, what we want them to be or to mean, what we project into them, etc. We talk to these symbols when we observe and seek to understand them more closely, and they talk back with

conceptualisations, that are being shared across cultures and societies, and those that are emerging in actual times.

spells and riddles, like oracles of yore. They are what they are, and paradoxically they are not, because they are rarely what they seem to be. In their worlds, things are constantly impermanent, temporary, volatile—intrinsically queer. In them, desire can function both as an orienting and a disorienting device. Transformations and twists happen so often that nothing ever stays in one place, or in one shape. It is only in their beginnings and in their endings that we taste a semblance of *forever*—it was always so, it will always be so—a reminder of how old our storytelling traditions are, and how they remain deeply interwoven with our social and individual conditions.

Appendixes

Appendix A. Numbered list of all 48 tales (before exclusions):

- (1.01) "Prunella" by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton (pp. 5-19)
- (1.02) "Little Fish" by Emily Hann (pp. 20-33)
- (1.03) "Bride of the Rose Beast" by Michelle "Misha" Krivanek (pp. 34-48)
- (1.04t) "Goldie Locks" by Joanne Webster and Isabelle Melançon (p. 49-57)
- (1.05) "Masks" by Megan Kearney (pp. 58-73)
- (1.06) "Godfather Death" by Laura Neubert (pp. 74-84)
- (1.07) "Crane Wife" by Alex Singer and Jayd Ait-Kaci (pp. 85-100)
- (1.08t) "The Steadfast Tin Automaton" by Alex Singer and Jayd Ait-Kaci (pp. 101-113)
- (1.09) "Flower in the Gravel" by Angelica Maria Lopez (pp. 114-125)
- (1.10) "Black Bull" by Justin Lanjil (pp. 126-138)
- (1.11) "Lady Tilda and the Dragon" by Sara Goetter (pp. 139-150)
- (1.12t) "Eggchild" by Ash Barnes and Elena "Yamino" Barbarich (pp. 151-159)
- (1.13) "Red Riding Hood" by Meaghan Carter (pp. 160-166)
- (1.14) "East of the Sun, West of the Moon" by Morgan Beem (pp. 167-173)
- (1.15) "The Nettle Witch" by Nicole Chartrand (pp. 174-188)
- (1.16) "Please" by August and Cory Brown (pp. 189-203)
- (1.17t) "All Furs" by Joanne Webster and Emily Hann (pp. 204-215)
- (1.18) "Nautilus" by Ash Barnes and Elena "Yamino" Barbarich (pp. 216-230)
- (1.19) "What Fear Said" by Katie and Steven Shanahan (pp. 231-239)

- (1.20) "Winter's Gift" by Joanne Webster and Isabelle Melançon (pp. 240-254)
- (1.21) "Blood from a Stone" by Annie Stoll and Tim Ferrara (pp. 255-269)
- (1.22t) "Finette" by Megan Lavey-Heaton and August Brown (pp. 270-275)
- (1.23) "Vasilisa" by Kadi Fedoruk (pp. 276-290)
- (2.01) "The Prince's New Clothes" by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton (pp. 7-16)
- (2.02) "Mom Knight and the Centipede" by Sara Goetter (pp. 17-28)
- (2.03t) "The Magnificent Daji" by Alex Singer and Diana Huh (pp. 29-36)
- (2.04) "Maleen" by Nicole Chartrand (pp. 37-49)
- (2.05) "Marie and the Nutcracker" by Emily Hann (pp. 50-62)
- (2.06) "The Laughing Queen" by Gisele Weaver (pp. 63-75)
- (2.07) "The Princess with no Reflection" by Camila Fortuna (pp. 76-89)
- (2.08t) "The Promise" by J.M. Frey and Angelica Maria Lopez (pp. 90-97)
- (2.09) "The Six" by Faye Simms (pp. 98-110)
- (2.10) "Lizard King" by Abby Howard (pp. 111-112)
- (2.11) "A Little Bird Told Me" by Justin Lanjil (pp. 113-124)
- (2.12) "The Dance of Spring" by Aliza Layne (pp. 125-128)
- (2.13) "The Giant who Dreamed of Elves" by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton (pp. 129-135)
- (2.14) "Sisters" Ru Xu (pp. 136-137)
- (2.15) "Swan Lake" by Natalie Riess (pp. 138-149)
- (2.16t) "The Robber Girl Tells her Story over a Round of Cards" by Rhiannon Rasmussen-Silverstein and Sarah Stern (pp. 150-154)
- (2.17) "The Glass Knight" by Capp & Lin (pp. 155-167)

- (2.18) "Dragonslayers Not Permitted" by Jasmine Walls (pp. 168-179)
- (2.19) "Spell It Out" by Ashanti Fortson (pp. 180-189)
- (2.20) "Song Without End" by Rennie Kingsley (pp. 190-196)
- (2.21) "Sunkissed" by Sam Davies (pp. 197-206)
- (2.22) "The Dragon Princess" by Ametalias (pp. 207-217)
- (2.23) "The Rose" by Mildred Louis (pp. 218-219)
- (2.24) "Heartless" by Kickingshoes (pp. 220-232)
- (2.25t) "The Doctor and the Curse" by Joanne Webster and Isabelle Melançon (pp. 233-247)

Appendix B. Categorisation of the 25 chosen tales and their Main Motifs:

Sapphic-Queer Retellings

- (1.02) "Little Fish" by Emily Hann, based on the Danish fairy-tale "Den Lille Havfrue" ("The Little Mermaid") by Hans Christian Andersen (1837).

Main fairy-tale motifs: Mythical creature (Mermaid), witch encounter (sought, spell with a price), magical item (transformation potion), corporeal transformation (into human & gender), royal wedding (not protagonist), hands holding (zoom), the power of a kiss (love as countercurse).

(1.03) "Bride of the Rose Beast" by Michelle "Misha" Krivanek, based on "Kong Lindorm" or "King Lindworm," also known as "Prince Lindworm," a Danish folktale first collected by Svend Grundtvig (1854). ATU 433B, Prince/King Lindworm.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Witch encounter (fortuitous, magic solution with specific steps to follow), magical item (two roses), mythical creature (Lindworm), meeting as predator & prey, saving the monster, survive horrors & hold onto the cursed beloved until dawn, corporeal transformation (cursed into bestial form & back into human), royal wedding, hands holding (no zoom), rags to riches.

(1.08t) "The Steadfast Tin Automaton" by Alex Singer and Jayd Ait-Kaci, based on the Danish fairy-tale "Den Standhaftige Tinsoldat" ("The Steadfast Tin Soldier") by Hans Christian Andersen (1838).

Main fairy-tale motifs: Living objects (Automata), elopement.

(1.10) "Black Bull" by Justin Lanjil, based on the Scottish fairy-tale "The Black Bull of Norroway," first printed by Robert Chambers in 1870. ATU 425A, The Animal as Bridegroom.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Virtue rewarded (hospitality, path to fate), witch encounter (fortuitous, fortune-teller), offering hand (visual), into magical place (mountain made of glass), killing a monster (glass monster), corporeal transformation (cursed into bestial form & back into human, gender), reunion with missing beloved.

(1.17t) "All Furs" by Joanne Webster and Emily Hann, based on the German fairy-tale "Allerleirauh" ("All-Kinds-of-Fur") collected by the Grimm Brothers (1819). ATU 510B, Peau d'Asne.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Corporeal transformation (many animal skins in one, wearing a skin), meeting as predator & prey, magical item (three dresses), witch encounter (memory, fairy godmother), royal wedding, riches to rags & rags to riches.

(2.05) "Marie and the Nutcracker" by Emily Hann, based on the story "Nussknacker und Mausekönig" ("Nutcracker and the Mouse King") by Prussian author E.T.A. Hoffmann (1816).

Main fairy-tale motifs: Living objects (dolls), witch encounter (creator, doll-maker), killing a monster (talking Rat King), into magical place (doll realm), hands holding (zoom), corporeal transformation (into human), reunion with missing beloved.

(2.15) "Swan Lake" by Natalie Riess, based on the story from the Russian ballet "Лебединое озеро" (Lebedínoye ózero, "Swan Lake") composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1875-1876).

Main fairy-tale motifs: Meeting as predator & prey, corporeal transformation (trickster, witch, cursed into bestial form & back into human), witch encounter (sorcerer, captor, active trickster), the power of a kiss (love as curse if given to the wrong one), magical helper (trickster), killing a monster (witch captor in bestial form), reunion with missing beloved.

(2.20) "Song Without End" by Rennie Kingsley, based on the folk Scottish ballad of Tam Lin, its best known version is the one collected by Francis James Child, the 39thA of 305 ballads (1882-1898).

Main fairy-tale motifs: Mythical creature (fae), witch encounter (fae, captor), corporeal transformation (cursed into various bestial forms & back into fae), resist wealthy temptations, survive horrors & hold onto the cursed beloved until dawn, hands holding (zoom + hand kiss zoom), the power of a kiss (love as an invitation to harmony).

Sapphic-Queer Originals (O)

(1.090) "Flower in the Gravel" by Angelica Maria Lopez.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Maiden in tower (dungeon keeper), dragon's treasure (maiden & wealth), hands holding (no zoom, several panels), mythical creature (dragon), virtue rewarded (kindness, wealth & partnership/friendship/love).

(1.180) "Nautilus" by Ash Barnes and Elena "Yamino" Barbarich. Even though this is not a retelling, it has similarities with ATU 505 type of folktale, The Grateful Dead.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Dead beloved (water ghost, visible only to the protagonist), hands holding (zoom, several panels), magical item (nautilus shell), magical helper (dead beloved), reunion with missing beloved.

(2.06O) "The Laughing Queen" by Gisele Weave.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Meeting as predator & prey, corporeal transformation (cursed into bestial form & back into human), virtue rewarded (generosity, protection & community), hold onto cursed beloved until dawn.

(2.08tO) "The Promise" by J.M. Frey and Angelica Maria Lopez.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Mythical creature (Loup-Garou/Wulver), corporeal transformation (mix between being cursed into bestial form and wearing a skin; wolf), pinprick curse (mixed blood), virtue rewarded (compassion, piety, life expansion, living & loving in two worlds, free love/partnerships, a child), elopement.

(2.12O) "The Dance of Spring" by Aliza Layne.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Mythical creature (embodiment of Spring), reunion with missing beloved, the power of a kiss (awakening), talking with flora and/or fauna (Bee).

(2.13O) "The Giant who Dreamed of Elves" by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Mythical creature (giants & elves), false heroine, reunion with missing beloved.

(2.17O) "The Glass Knight" by Capp & Lin. It has a few similarities to the story of Galathea and Pygmalion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Witch encounter (creatrix, friend, lover), into magical place (coral lily field, sea of sorrow), mythical creature/living object (golem-like glass

woman), magical item (coral lily as heart), quest of knighthood (self), hands holding (zoom), reunion with missing beloved.

(2.21O) "Sunkissed" by Sam Davies.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Mythical creature (embodiment of the Sun), the power of a kiss ([re]energised).

(2.22O) "The Dragon Princess" by Ametalias.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Princess (reverse maiden in tower/dragon analogy), meeting as predator & prey, royal wedding, hands holding (zoom).

Grey-Area Retellings (GA)

(1.07GA) "Crane Wife" by Alex Singer and Jayd Ait-Kaci, based both on the popular Japanese folktale "鶴の恩返し" (Tsuru no Ongaeshi, "Crane's Return of a Favour") and its variant "鶴女房" (Tsuru Nyōbō, "Crane Wife").

Main fairy-tale motifs: Meeting as predator & prey, mythical creature (crane woman), corporeal transformation (into human), virtue rewarded (compassion, wealth, status, power), magical item (折鶴, orizuru or paper crane).

(1.16GA) "Please" by August and Cory Brown, based on the German fairy tale "Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot" ("Snow-White and Rose-Red") collected by the Grimm Brothers (1837). ATU 426, The Two Girls, the Bear and the Dwarf

Main fairy-tale motifs: Corporeal transformation (cursed into bestial form & back into human), magical item (cursed sword), resist wealthy temptations, virtue rewarded (hospitality, loyalty, friendship, abundance), meeting as predator & prey.

(1.23GA) "Vasilisa" by Kadi Fedoruk, based on the Russian fairy-tale "Василиса Прекрасная" (Vasilisa Prekrasnaya, "Vasilisa the Beautiful") collected by Alexander Afanasyev (1855-1863). ATU 510A, Cinderella.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Magical item (матрёшка or matryoshka doll, cursed flaming skull), dead beloved (ghost of mother), into magical place (Baba Yaga's hut), witch encounter (sought, impossible tasks, Baba Yaga), reunion with missing beloved.

(2.04GA) "Maleen" by Nicole Chartrand, based on the German fairy-tale "Jungfrau Maleen" ("Maid Maleen") collected by the Grimm Brothers (1850). ATU 870, The Entombed Princess.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Maiden in tower (2 women, several years).

(2.16tGA) "The Robber Girl Tells her Story over a Round of Cards" by Rhiannon Rasmussen-Silverstein and Sarah Stern, spin-off based on the Danish fairy-tale "Snedronningen" or "Snow Queen" by Hans Christian Andersen (1844).

Main fairy-tale motifs: Witch encounter (memory, sought, Snow Queen), royal wedding (memory, not protagonist), talking with flora and/or fauna, virtue rewarded (hospitality, compassion, generosity, gratefulness, motivation).

Grey-Area Originals (GAO)

(1.12tGAO) "Eggchild" by Ash Barnes and Elena "Yamino" Barbarich.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Poverty, mythical creature (Gryphon), meeting as predator & prey, adopted by animal guardian.

(2.11GAO) "A Little Bird Told Me" by Justin Lanjil, based on the Valkyrjur or Valkyries ("choosers of the slain"), renowned female figures from the Norse Mythology. This tale was possibly inspired in part by the skaldic poem "Hrafnsmál" ("Raven Song") by Þorbjörn Hornklofi.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Mythical creature (Valkyrjur), quest of knighthood/valour (sisterhood), corporeal transformation (birds into human-form and vice versa, wearing a skin), virtue rewarded with magical item (golden leaf key), reunion with missing beloved (sisterhood).

(2.18GAO) "Dragonslayers Not Permitted" by Jasmine Walls.

Main fairy-tale motifs: Witch encounter (orc matriarch), mythical creature (orcs, dragon), quest of knighthood/valour (selflessness), dragon's treasure (maiden, wealth), cursed into bestial form (human), virtue rewarded with magical item (dragon scales).

Appendix C. List of Images/Illustrations Referenced

(Fig. 1) Description: Lady Yamagata with katana, background.

Illustrated by Jayd Ait-Kaci, "Crane Wife." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 89.

(Fig. 2) Description: Female detective.

Illustrated by Jayd Ait-Kaci, "Crane Wife." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 94.

(Fig. 3) Description: Moment of realisation.

Illustrated by Jayd Ait-Kaci, "Crane Wife." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 100.

(Fig. 4) Description: Hands close-up.

Illustrated by Emily Hann, "Little Fish." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 32.

(Fig. 5) Description: Teaching of Sign Language.

Illustrated by Emily Hann, "Little Fish." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 26.

(Fig. 6) Description: Kari whipping the Lindworm.

Illustrated by Michelle "Misha" Krivanek, "Bride of the Rose Beast." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, pp. 44-45.

(Fig. 7) Description: Roza & Kari's wedding.

Illustrated by Michelle "Misha" Krivanek, "Bride of the Rose Beast." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 48.

(Fig. 8) Description: Meeting, hand, & bull.

Illustrated by Justin Lanjil, "Black Bull." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 129.

(Fig. 9) Description: Stabbing the glass demon.

Illustrated by Justin Lanjil, "Black Bull." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 133.

(Fig. 10) Description: Reunion.

Illustrated by Justin Lanjil, "Black Bull." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 138.

(Fig. 11) Description: Close embrace.

Illustrated by Justin Lanjil, "Black Bull." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 138.

(Fig. 12) Description: 2nd Hands close-up.

Illustrated by Emily Hann & Shaikara David as colour assistant, "Marie and the Nutcracker." *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 59.

(Fig. 13) Description: Invitation and dance scene.

Illustrated by Emily Hann & Shaikara David as colour assistant, "Marie and the Nutcracker." *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 60.

(Fig. 14) Description: Sweet rose gift.

Illustrated by Emily Hann & Shaikara David as colour assistant, "Marie and the Nutcracker." *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 59.

(Fig. 15) Description: Orange star flower gift.

Illustrated by Elena "Yamino" Barbarich, "Nautilus." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 224.

(Fig. 16) Description: 3rd Hands close-up.

Illustrated by Elena "Yamino" Barbarich, "Nautilus." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 219.

(Fig. 17) Description: 4th Hands close-up.

Illustrated by Elena "Yamino" Barbarich, "Nautilus." *Valor: Swords*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2015, reprinted in 2019, p. 223.

(Fig. 18) Description: 5th Hands close-up & Jenet's invitation to Primrose.

Illustrated by Rennie Kingsley, "Song Without End" *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 195.

(Fig. 19) Description: The Witch kisses her Glass Knight's hand.

Illustrated by Anna "Capp" Assan, "The Glass Knight" *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 167.

(Fig. 20) Description: Dragon Princess wedding.

Illustrated by Ametalias, "The Dragon Princess" *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 216.

(Fig. 21) Description: Odile seduces Princess Friedine.

Illustrated by Ametalias, "The Dragon Princess" *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 143.

(Fig. 22) Description: Odile, the black swan, flying free.

Illustrated by Ametalias, "The Dragon Princess" *Valor 2: Wands*, edited by Isabelle Melançon and Megan Lavey-Heaton. Fairylogue Press, 2018, p. 149.

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