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“Se lieie la favola”: Apuleian Play in Basile’s *Lo cunto de li cunti*

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Thrice Upon a Time

Between 1634 and 1636, a number of Neapolitan editors and publishers took it upon themselves to publish an extraordinary collection of stories, entitled *Lo cunto de li cunti, ovvero lo trattenimento de peccerille* (*The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for the Little Ones*, a.k.a. *Pentamerone*).¹ Its author Giambattista Basile had passed away two years earlier. Basile had been a man of letters, active at several literary academies and courts in Naples, a connoisseur of the classics and a Petrarch enthusiast.² Written in a highly stylized version of the Neapolitan dialect (as opposed to the more traditional Tuscan), the *Cunto* is nowadays mostly remembered for its narrative content. For here we have the first collection of stories in the history of Western literature to be made up almost entirely of the sort of narratives we today would refer to as fairy tales. As such, it constitutes an important step towards the conceptualization and institutionalization of the European fairy-tale genre, which would only take off properly in the aristocrat literary salons of late seventeenth-century Paris.

¹ For the collection’s publishing history, see, e.g., the introduction to G. Basile, in *Lo cunto de li cunti*, ed. M. Rak, Milan, 1999, pp. xvii–xix; see also this volume for the annotated bilingual Neapolitan/Italian text edition to which I refer. For an annotated English translation, see G. Basile, *The Tale of Tales, or, Entertainment for Little Ones*, ed. and transl. N. L. Canepa, Detroit, 2007.

² For a brief survey of Basile’s life and work, see, e.g., N. Canepa, *From Court to Forest: Giambattista Basile’s Lo cunto de li cunti and the Birth of the Literary Fairy Tale*, Detroit, 1999, pp. 35–51, and N. Canepa, ‘G. Basile, 1575?–1632’, in *The Teller’s Tale: Lives of the Classic Fairy Tale Authors*, ed. S. Raynard, New York, 2012, pp. 25–37.

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The frame tale of the *Cunto* recounts the misfortunes of Princess Zoza of Valle Pelosa, how she is cursed by an obscene old hag never to find a husband, unless perhaps a certain Prince Tadeo, who, however, has fallen victim to a sleeping curse. Zoza wanders the land, gains the favour of three fairies and almost succeeds in waking up Tadeo. Unfortunately, she gives into her own sleepiness just before breaking the spell. The wicked slave girl Lucia steps in and takes the credit for Zoza's efforts, subsequently claiming the prince for herself. Using the magical gifts she has received from the fairies, Zoza manages to instil a deep desire for hearing stories in the false bride, a desire which turns out to be her downfall. Ten ungainly peasant women are invited to the palace in order to share their marvellous tales with the court over a period of five days. As the final day reaches its conclusion, Zoza takes her place in the circle of storytellers, telling her own tale of woe and exposing the slave girl Lucia's deceit. After Lucia has been sentenced to a torturous death, the new couple are wed amid festivities.

This article is concerned with two particular tales which are recounted within the narrative framework of *Lo cunto*. They can be summarized as follows: 'Lo catenaccio' ('The Padlock', day II, tale 9) tells of a poor woman who has three daughters, the youngest and most beautiful of whom, Luciella, is also the most helpful around the house. While fetching water at the town fountain, the girl is approached by a slave who promises her a reward if she will go with him to a secret cave. There, she discovers a glamorous underground palace. Having been lavishly dressed by two servant girls, she is offered a sumptuous meal and is then put to bed. Each night, she is visited by a mysterious bedfellow. This goes on for some time, until Luciella longs to see her mother. The slave requests permission for her from his shadowy master and sends the girl off with a sack of money, but bids her to return after her visit and to not tell anyone about her new situation.

As this scenario is repeated several times, Luciella's harpy-like sisters grow more envious of her riches and begin to investigate her goings, finally learning the truth from an ogress. During the girl's next visit, they convince her that she has been sleeping with a handsome, though cursed man, who has been feeding her a sleeping potion each night after their nightly games. In order to break the spell, or so her sisters claim, she must avoid drinking from the cup and open the magical padlock which they have bestowed on her. That night, Luciella lights a candle to reveal her husband's beautiful body. She flips open the padlock, and, out of nowhere, a group of women appear, all of them carrying yarn on their heads. When one of them drops her skein, the girl loudly tells her to pick it up and thus awakens her lover. A slave is called, and, as punishment for her guile, Luciella is sent home in her old rags.

Upon returning to her sisters, they spitefully kick her out; and so Luciella, now pregnant, begins her long wanderings. Unwittingly, she seeks shelter at the castle belonging to the very queen who is mother to her husband, and there she gives birth to a son. Luciella's cursed lover begins to visit the palace by stealth each night, in order to see his offspring, but he is somehow forced to disappear again before the rooster's crow. The curious queen, having been made aware of the supposed stranger's comings and goings, has all the roosters in the land massacred and waits for the mysterious visitor. In the end, she, her son and her daughter-in-law are happily reunited.

The second tale of interest here, ‘Lo turzo d’oro’ (‘The Golden Trunk’, day V, tale 4), centres on the peasant girl Parmetella, the youngest and most beautiful of three sisters living with their poor father. Spurned by her unfriendly sisters, Parmetella ventures into the woods until she reaches a clearing. There, she finds a tree covered in golden leaves, which she picks throughout the summer to sustain her family, until nothing remains but a golden trunk. When she finally cuts the tree down with a hatchet, she discovers a staircase beneath its roots and follows it down to a subterranean cave leading to a lovely meadow in which stands an ornate palace. When she sits down there to eat, she is visited by a Moorish slave who asks her to be his wife. She acquiesces and is given an enchanted diamond carriage pulled by flying horses, as well as a host of monkeys dressed in golden robes to wait on her. When it is time for bed, her betrothed requests that she put out the candle and not relight it during or after their lovemaking. Already on the second night, the curious girl breaks her husband’s rule and finds that he has turned into a beautiful white youth. He wakes up cursing and informs her that she has now lengthened his day-time enchantment and exile by seven years, then disappears.

As Parmetella makes her way back home, she is greeted by a fairy who endows her with seven spindles, seven figs and a jar of honey and instructs her to roam the world until she has worn out seven pairs of iron shoes. Only then will she come to a house where seven man-eating ogresses, none other than Parmetella’s sisters-in-law, stand spinning with tools made out of human bones. She is to use the objects given to her to obtain from the monsters an oath not to harm her, swearing on their lost brother’s/her husband’s name: *Truone-e-lampe* (‘Thunder-and-Lightning’). Everything comes to pass as the fairy has foretold. Parmetella then also manages to subdue her ogress mother-in-law by pulling down hard on one of her drooping bosoms until she swears to leave Parmetella be.

Shortly after, the ogress nonetheless threatens to gobble Parmetella up if she is unable to sort out a bag of beans, lentils, rice and so on before the day’s end. In the meantime, *Truone-e-lampe*’s unexplained exile has ended, and he secretly fulfils the ‘Herculean labour’ in his wife’s stead. Parmetella’s next task is to stuff twelve mattresses with feathers without leaving behind one downy plumelet on the floor, again flawlessly executed with her husband’s help. Finally, the ogress sends the girl out to her sister’s house in order to fetch some musical instruments for her son’s impending arranged marriage to someone else. Meanwhile, the monstrous duo plots to kill Parmetella upon her arrival there and cook her for supper. *Truone-e-lampe* gives his beloved instructions to escape her doom. First, she will have to ward off a Corsican hound by throwing him a loaf of bread. Next, she is to distract a wild horse with a bundle of hay and then keep the ogress’s front door open with a rock. When the ogress asks her to hold her baby for her while she retrieves the instruments (giving her time to sharpen her teeth), Parmetella is to wait until she is gone, throw the baby into the burning furnace, grab the box containing the instruments and flee. Under no circumstances is she allowed to open the box. Things go as planned. When the ogress calls for the door, the horse and the hound to stop the girl, they refuse out of gratitude for the services Parmetella has performed for them. Then curiosity gets the better of her: once she is in the clear, she takes the lid off the box, and the instruments fly away. Her disgruntled husband comes to the rescue again and whistles them back into their container.

The couple returns to his mother's house, where Truone-e-lampe is wed to a vile and villainous woman. During their wedding night, he slits his unwanted bride's throat and elopes with his true beloved. The old ogress hurries to her sister for help, but finds that she has thrown herself into the oven out of grief for her baby, thus stinking up the entire neighbourhood. In an act of desperation, she transforms herself into a ram and bashes out her brains against the wall. Parmetella and Truone-e-lampe make peace with his sisters and live happily together.

To many, if not most readers of classical Latin literature, the stories reflected in these two summaries will appear familiar, at least in part. Indeed, it is hard *not* to think of the ancient *fabula* of 'Cupid and Psyche' (actually untitled) as recounted by a drunken crone to a freshly kidnapped girl in Apuleius's proto-novelistic *Metamorphoses*, *sive Asinus aureus* (*Metamorphoses, or the Golden Ass*, second century AD).³ Compare:

'Cupid and Psyche'	'Lo catenaccio'	'Lo turzo d'oro'
Three daughters in a royal family; the youngest, Psyche, is the most beautiful and kind of them	Three daughters in a poor family of a single mother; the youngest, Luciella, is the most beautiful and kind of them	Three daughters in a poor family of a single father; the youngest, Parmetella, is the most beautiful and kind of them
Zephyrus takes the girl to a beautiful meadow with a marvellous palace; she is waited on by ethereal voices	A slave takes the girl to an underground cave with a marvellous palace; she is waited on by servant girls	The girl finds an underground cave that leads her to a beautiful meadow with a marvellous palace; a black slave asks for her hand in marriage; she is waited on by dressed-up monkeys
A mysterious husband visits her under the cover of darkness	A mysterious husband visits her under the cover of darkness	Her slave husband visits her under the cover of darkness
She is given control over her husband's servant Zephyrus to fly in her jealous sisters for visits, provided she say nothing about her husband	Her husband's slave serves as an intermediary to let her visit her mother and jealous sisters, provided she say nothing about her situation	She is given a flying diamond coach
The envious sisters trick her into believing her husband is a monster	The envious sisters trick her into believing her husband needs to be disenchanted by her immediately	

³ The story encompasses Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, IV.28–VI.24. I refer to the edition in Apuleius, *Cupid and Psyche*, ed. E. J. Kenney, Cambridge, 1990. The analysis presented here is based on a more elaborate chapter in my doctoral dissertation: S. Praet, *Fairy Tales and the Latin Tradition: A Literary-Contextualising Approach*, Ghent, 2014, pp. 107–143. A year after I defended this dissertation, Armando Maggi published his own separate views on the topic in *Preserving the Spell: Basile's 'The Tale of Tales' and Its Afterlife in the Fairy-Tale Tradition*, Chicago, 2015, pp. 25–67. It was only after I submitted a first draft of this article in the spring of 2016 that I became aware of his work. Maggi's reading centres on how Basile's 'Catenaccio' and 'Turzo d'oro' can be seen as mutually complementary 'down-to-earth' responses to more traditional, idealizing Renaissance interpretations of 'Cupid and Psyche' as a philosophical/spiritual allegory of the difficult, but rewarding, entanglement of (divine) Love and Soul. While my intention in this paper is to elucidate the connections between Basile and Apuleius (sharing some, but not all points, with Maggi), I strive, in addition, to relate them to the Baroque aesthetics of *Lo cuntio*.

‘Cupid and Psyche’	‘Lo catenaccio’	‘Lo turzo d’oro’
She waits until he is asleep, lights an oil lamp and prepares to kill him	She waits until he is asleep, lights a candle, and opens the magical padlock	She is curious to look at him, waits until he is asleep and lights a candle
She discovers that he is a beautiful divine man. He wakes when a drop of hot lamp oil fall onto his body and leaves her with her unborn child	She discovers that he is a beautiful man. He wakes when she makes too much noise and leaves her with her unborn child	She discovers that he is a beautiful white man. He wakes and leaves her
She wanders about for a long time until she goes to the palace of her husband’s adverse goddess mother Venus	She wanders about for a long time until she unwittingly goes to the palace of her husband’s benevolent royal mother. She gives birth to a son	She wanders about for a long time until she goes to the house of her husband’s murderous ogress mother
Venus gives her impossible tasks as an excuse to mistreat her, also in the hope that she will die:		The ogress gives her impossible tasks as an excuse to cannibalize her:
(1) Sorting lentils, beans, grains. She gets help from ants		(1) Sorting lentils, beans, rice. She gets help from her husband
(2) Collecting golden wool from aggressive sheep. She gets help from the reeds		(2) Stuffing mattresses with feathers. She gets help from her husband
(3) Travelling to another deathly goddess, Proserpine, to collect a box of Beauty. Obstacles: man carrying branches who want to load her down, three-headed dog Cerberus, soul floating in the water, weaver-women. Psyche opens the box out of curiosity but is saved by her husband		(3) Travelling to another deathly ogress to collect a box of instruments. Obstacles: Corsican hound, wild horse, front door, cannibal ogress who want to load her down. Parmetella opens the box out of curiosity but is saved by her husband
Official celestial wedding and feast; the divine family is reconciled. Psyche gives birth to a daughter	She is finally reunited with her husband, and he with his mother. The sisters are torn with envy at Luciella’s happiness	‘Extra’ episode with false bride and ogre wedding; the sisters-in-law are eventually reconciled to Parmetella

How should we approach the striking parallels between these three texts? In my view, this question pertains both to origin and purpose: where do the similarities come from and what literary function do they serve within Basile’s *Cunto*? The answer I propose is that Basile creatively rewrote the Apuleian tale, not once, but twice, and that he was counting on his educated audiences in the Neapolitan courts and academies to pick up on this and to factor it into their reading/listening experience. There are several reasons that lead me to adopt this stance: firstly, the elaboration of relatively recent insights and theories in fairy-tale studies; secondly, the prominent status of Apuleius’s works in early modern European culture; thirdly,

the presence of further elements scattered throughout *Lo cunto* that are likewise suggestive of an Apuleian indebtedness; and finally, the manner in which Basile rewrites ‘Cupid and Psyche’ also neatly corresponds to his overall Baroque approach to classical literary models.

The Search for the Lost ...?

The first of these reasons is more of a general caveat. For more than 200 years, ever since the Brothers Grimm helped to lay the foundations for the later field of fairy-tale studies, there has existed a powerful association in the minds of scholars and the broader public alike between fairy tales and folklore. The most dominant and still lingering theory has been that the literary fairy-tale collections by authors from early modernity onwards were, if not faithful transcriptions, then at least embellished adaptations of popular folktales which had been transmitted orally from one generation to another, in some cases for many centuries. Accordingly, a common view concerning the genesis of Basile’s *cunti* encountered in modern scholarship is that he appropriated his marvellous plotlines from folktales which he had heard in the Neapolitan streets and countryside or during his travels abroad. So, with reference to ‘Lo turzo d’oro’, William Hansen confidently claims that

it is surely impossible to explain this impressive correspondence in basic events and details between Apuleius’s tale and later texts of the *Disenchanted Husband* otherwise than as a consequence of their belonging to the same narrative tradition, and the simplest assumption about Apuleius’s relationship to the tradition is that he drew upon it for his narrative.⁴

In a footnote to her translation of ‘Lo catenaccio’, Nancy Canepa likewise notes its resemblance to the story in Apuleius, but instead of hypothesising the former’s dependence on the latter, she invokes ‘a very similar Greek tale ... from which Basile may have derived his There are also variants from Turkey and Crete, and Basile could have heard one of these while in Venice or Crete (where he was stationed during 1604–1607), though it does not seem that he knew either Turkish or modern Greek’.⁵ Like Hansen, Canepa, moreover, matches the tale in question to so-called folkloric ‘tale types’ (AT 425: *The Search for the Lost Husband* and AT 425E: *Enchanted Husband Sings Lullaby*), supposedly prototypical story-structures found in written and spoken narratives across the globe and catalogued in the Aarne-Thompson(-Uther)-index, a standard research tool in the study of folktales.⁶

The underlying idea here, expressed more explicitly by Hansen, is that Apuleius and Basile *both* turned to the same centuries-old international substratum of traditional popular storytelling in order to come up with their own ‘variants’ of

⁴ W. Hansen, *Ariadne’s Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*, Ithaca, NY, 2002, p. 111.

⁵ Canepa in Basile, *Tale of Tales* (n. 1 above), p. 12.

⁶ H.-J. Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 3 vols, Helsinki, 2004.

specific tale types, thus elevating instances of narrative folk-art to the level of ‘high culture.’ In Maggi’s words, this would make the two Basilean *cunti*

the first transcriptions of European oral renderings of the classical myth. ... Apuleius composed a ‘civil’ rendering of the story, ... whereas Basile’s two versions brought it back to the macabre reality of the common people, who know that nature is not benign, that no providence is pulling the strings behind the scenes, that life is a sequence of a ‘thousand torments’, and that happiness means being oblivious of the suffering of others.⁷

Since the late 1970s, the fields of folk- and fairy-tale studies have undergone some significant shifts, leading contemporary scholars to tread carefully where it concerns some of our more traditional assumptions regarding the relationship between fairy tales and folklore. More nuanced, dialectic explanatory models have emerged in which the fairy tale’s origins and migrations are understood as the result of complex two-way interactions between the spoken and the written, the folkloric and the literary, the popular and the elitist. That said, a number of scholars have also adopted a more decisively critical stance vis-à-vis the assumed paramount importance of traditional folklore in fairy-tale genesis.⁸ Ruth Bottigheimer, for instance, begins her ‘new history’ of the fairy tale by straightforwardly positing: ‘folk invention and transmission of fairy tales has no basis in verifiable fact. Literary analysis undermines it, literary history rejects it, social history repudiates it, and publishing history (whether of manuscripts or of books) contradicts it’.⁹ The alternative genealogy she outlines is primarily based on textually supported dissemination and adaptation, of authors drawing directly on other authors. Focusing more specifically on the Grimms’s *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children’s and Household Tales*, 1812–1858), Willem de Blécourt has painstakingly reconstructed an extensive corpus of existing printed fairy tales and other texts with which the Grimms and their oral informers (mostly well-educated girls from their own social circles in the German aristocracy and bourgeoisie) would have engaged in the creation of their own stories, with little need for hypothetical oral folkloric sources. In a related vein, Ute Heidmann and Jean-Michel Adam warn against

le renvoi systématique au folklore et aux ‘contes-types.’ Le fait de considérer Basile, Perrault, Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier ou Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy comme

⁷ Maggi, *Preserving the Spell* (n. 3 above), p. 67. It comes as somewhat of a surprise that Maggi chooses to end his chapter on Basile and Apuleius in this way, given that much of his (at times somewhat tendentiously bleak) reading hinges on a contrastive comparison of the three tales and that at one point (p. 41) he explicitly refers to the Latin text as Basile’s ‘source.’

⁸ See R. B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales: A New History*, New York, 2009; W. De Blécourt, *Tales of Magic, Tales in Print: On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm*, Manchester and New York, 2012; U. Heidmann and J.-M. Adam, *Textualité et intertextualité des contes. Perrault, Apulée, La Fontaine, Lhéritier...*, Paris, 2010; but also A. Wesselski, *Versuch einer Theorie des Märchen*, Hildesheim, 1974. The work of these scholars has caused quite a stir in the field. See, e.g., the criticisms in J. Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*, Oxford and Princeton, 2012, pp. 46–9, 157–73, 175–89, as well the special issue, *The European Fairy-Tale Tradition: Between Orality and Literacy*, of the *American Journal for Folklore*, 123.490, 2010, envisioned specifically as a critical dialogue with Bottigheimer.

⁹ Bottigheimer, *New History* (n. 8 above), p. 1.

les transcripteurs de contes populaires a empêché les découvertes que l'on peut faire quand on replonge leurs recueils dans le cadre socio-discursif de leur émergence historique et quand on prend au sérieux leur nature de textes.¹⁰

Their own minute ‘palimpsestic’ analyses of Charles Perrault’s tales and their peritexts focus on tracing their creatively and hermeneutically significant intertextual and intergeneric dialogues with a myriad of contemporaneous and older authors, including Virgil, Apuleius, Giovanni Boccaccio, Miguel de Cervantes, Giovan Francesco Straparola, Basile, Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy, Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier, Jean de La Fontaine and Nicolas Boileau.

Whatever one’s position regarding the relationship between fairy tales and folklore, it is becoming increasingly clear that in many specific cases the strong indebtedness of fairy tales to folklore cannot be unproblematically accepted as a self-evident fact. As for Apuleius’s ‘Cupid and Psyche’ and Basile’s ‘Lo turzo d’oro’ and ‘Lo catenaccio’, the oral folkloric hypothesis still dominates, both in the writings of classicists and fairy-tale scholars. To be clear: I do not intend to re-open the old discussion regarding the narrative models for ‘Cupid and Psyche’,¹¹ which I have already addressed elsewhere and which would also lead us too far astray from the topic of this article. Suffice it to say that I am not convinced that there is any conclusive proof for the existence of a *wholly* comparable tale in either an oral or a written format before Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*.¹² I wish to consider instead the nature of Basile’s relation to Apuleius. According to the suggestions of scholars such as Hansen, the transformation which took place from Apuleius’s *fabula* to Basile’s *cunti* was most likely carried out over a long period of time by a chain of storytellers belonging to ‘the folk’, rather than by one single Neapolitan author, who was thus primarily a transcriber and secondary embellisher of an oral tradition. Yet, while it would be impossible to disprove this scenario with absolute certainty, there is another one which is at least as likely: Basile drew directly on the Apuleian text itself.

We need only take a brief look at the rich and well-documented history of the transmission and reception of the *Metamorphoses* to reassure ourselves of

¹⁰ Heidmann and Adam, *Textualité* (n. 8 above), p. 20.

¹¹ See Praet, *Fairy Tales* (n. 3 above), pp. 107–22, and to a lesser extent S. Praet, ‘Reader Beware: Apuleius, Metafiction and the Literary Fairy Tale’, in *Anti-Tales: The Uses of Disenchantment*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011, pp. 37–50. The first of these critically engages with a variety of scholars who have added their voice to the debate over the past sixty years (e.g., Jan-Öjvind Swahn, Detlev Fehling, Teresa Mantero, Carl C. Schlam, Graham Anderson, etc.). A more recent contribution which deserves further consideration is E. Plantade and N. Plantade, ‘Libyca Psyche: Apuleius and the Berber Folktales’, in *Apuleius and Africa*, ed. B. T. Lee, E. Finkelpearl and L. Graverini, New York and London, 2014, pp. 174–202, which presents some interesting parallels between the Apuleian text and seven oral Berber stories from northern Africa. The Berber stories, however, were only collected during the 20th century, which I feel cannot guarantee that they formed a part of the indigenous folklore almost two millennia earlier.

¹² At the same time, there is ample reason for considering the text’s intertextual play with and partial rewritings of various other pieces of classical literature. A recent example of such an approach would be S. J. Harrison, *Framing the Ass: Literary Texture in Apuleius’ Metamorphoses*, Oxford, 2013, in which the author convincingly shows how ‘Cupid and Psyche’ works as a mock epic in a constant dialogue with other Latin and Greek authors, including Virgil and Ovid.

Apuleius’s strong presence in the literary cultures of Europe, especially from the late Middle Ages onwards.¹³ Near the end of the fourth century, a copy of the *Metamorphoses* came into the possession of a young Roman aristocrat named Sallustius, the text’s earliest identifiable editor and commentator. Shortly afterwards, St Augustine ensured Apuleius’s name and reputation would survive antiquity and into the Middle Ages by praising him as a noble Platonist and by critically engaging with his *Metamorphoses* and *De deo Socratis* (*On the God of Socrates*). Around the beginning of the sixth century, the mythographer Fulgentius provided a rough summary of the story of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ for an allegorizing purpose, going up to the girl’s discovery of the sleeping god, after which he refers his readers to Apuleius’s original.

In the eleventh century, a codex of the Sallustius edition in the Italian monastery of Monte Cassino was copied into what is believed to be the archetype of the later manuscript tradition. Before the late thirteenth century, however, the *Metamorphoses* seems to have had next to no impact on the creation of *new* works of literature. Although it has been argued that the romance of *Partonopeu de Blois* (c. 1160–1170) may have been partially inspired by the story of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ and that Apuleian traces can be found in a number of twelfth-century French romances, there is little certainty about the matter.¹⁴ This might be indicative of the absence of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ in narrative repertoires of the High Middle Ages, especially given that the Latin and vernacular literatures of this period display a great proliferation of such marvellous stories in the form of *lais*, romances, (mock-) epic poems, songs, *exempla* and local historiography.¹⁵

The situation changed dramatically from the fourteenth century onwards, when the *Metamorphoses* fell into the hands of authors like Boccaccio and Petrarch. Boccaccio studied and annotated a manuscript of the work, made a copy for himself, played with it on several occasions in his *Decameron* and wrote an allegorizing interpretation of the character of Psyche in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (*Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 1355). The earliest printed edition of the extant works of Apuleius appeared in 1469, making him one of the first classical authors to be distributed through the printed word in Italy. In 1518, Matteo Maria Boiardo published the first vernacular translation of the *Metamorphoses*, the *Apulegio volgare* (*Apuleius in the Popular Tongue*). This work brought the story of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ to an even wider readership, also inspiring the literary and visual arts, with illustrious examples such as the frescoed rooms by Raphael in the Villa Farnesina in Rome (1526–1528) and by Giulio Romano in the Palazzo Te in Mantua

¹³ See the seminal studies by J. H. Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass: A Study in Transmission and Reception*, Oxford/Princeton, 2008, pp. 296–99 and passim; R. H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Oxford, 2007.

¹⁴ See Carver, *Protean Ass* (n. 13 above), pp. 61–107; D. Fehling, *Amor und Psyche: Die Schöpfung des Apuleius und ihre Einwirkung auf das Märchen. Eine Kritik der romantischen Märchentheorie*, Wiesbaden, 1977, pp. 40–6.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Praet, *Fairy Tales* (n. 3 above), pp. 298–308 and passim; A. Vårvaro, *Apparizioni fantastiche: Tradizioni folcloriche e letteratura nel medioevo*, Bologna, 1994, p. 18; J. Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies*, Ann Arbor, 2007, pp. 232–36 and passim.

(1518–1519).¹⁶ Accompanied by Filippo Beroaldo's voluminous commentaries (1500), the *Metamorphoses* travelled throughout Europe, with translations appearing in German, French, Spanish and English. Apuleius left his mark on literary works of the Renaissance as diverse as Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*Poliphilus's Strife of Love in a Dream*, 1499), Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1581, 1584) and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1590–1596), as well as Lorenzo Selva's *Della metamorfosi* (*On the Metamorphosis*, 1582), which employs a frame story roughly modelled on the adventures of Apuleius's unfortunate hero Lucius and also includes a number of other fairy tale-like stories.¹⁷

In the seventeenth century, not long after Basile's *Cunto* was published, Pedro Calderón de la Barca responded to 'Cupid and Psyche' in his two religious plays: *Psiquis y Cupido para Toledo* (*Cupid and Psyche, written in Toledo*, 1640) and *Psiquis y Cupido para Madrid* (*Cupid and Psyche, written in Madrid*, 1665). La Fontaine took a very different route by recreating the story as a *conte galant* in his *Amours de Psyché et Cupidon* (*Loves of Psyche and Cupid*, 1669), followed shortly after by the *tragédie-ballet Psyché* (1671), written in prose by Molière and versified by Pierre Corneille and Philippe Quinault with music by Jean-Baptiste Lully, one of ten major operas and ballets composed on the subject during the seventeenth century, not counting many shorter songs.¹⁸ The tale also played a key role in the literary vogue of *contes de(s) fées* which swept the courts and salons of France in the 1690s.¹⁹ D'Aulnoy draws on it in several of her *Contes des Fées* (*Tales of the Fairies*, 1697–1698), including 'Le Mouton' ('The Ram'), 'Serpentin Vert' ('The Green Serpent') and 'Gracieuse et Percinet.' Perrault, in the preface to his *Contes en vers* (*Verse Tales*, 1694), explicitly refers to the 'Conte ancien' of 'Cupid and Psyche' as an example of the pleasant, if morally inferior, classical counterparts to his novel brand of allegedly 'native' French tales,²⁰ though the ancient tale in question seems to have been a significant precursor to his own writings. Possibly, the frontispiece to the 1697 edition of his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (*Stories or Tales of Days Gone By*) was even designed with the popular illustrations to Boiardo's *Apulegio volgare* in mind.²¹

¹⁶ For 'Cupid and Psyche' in Renaissance art, see J. De Long, 'Renaissance Representations of Cupid and Psyche: Apuleius vs. Fulgentius', in *Groningen Colloquia of the Novel*, II, ed. H. Hofmann, Groningen, 1989, pp. 75–87; L. Sozzi, *Amore e Psiche: Un mito dall' allegoria alla parodia*, Bologna, 2007, pp. 35–8.

¹⁷ For the latter, see S. Magnanini, 'The Literary Fairy Tale in Italy', in *Fairy Tales Framed: Early Forewords, Afterwords, and Critical Words*, ed. R. B. Bottigheimer, Albany, 2012, p. 25n. The other texts mentioned in this sentence are all discussed as chapter-long case studies in Carver, *Protean Ass* (n. 13 above).

¹⁸ For musical adaptations of the story, see G. M. Benzing, 'Metamorfosi, scomparsa e riemersioni del mito di Psiche in musica', in *Amore e Psiche: La favola dell' anima*, ed. E. Fontanella, Milan, 2013, p. 454.

¹⁹ For the importance of Apuleius to late 17th-century French fairy-tale writing, see Heidmann and Adam, *Textualité* (n. 8 above); Fehling, *Schöpfung* (n. 14 above), pp. 55–9; J. Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/ Myth as Fairy Tale*, Lexington, 1994, pp. 25–7. For the impact of Basile on the development of the later fairy-tale tradition, see Maggi, *Preserving the Spell* (n. 3 above); Bottigheimer, *New History* (n. 8 above), pp. 57–74; Heidmann and Adam, *Textualité* (n. 8 above), 40–9 and *passim*.

²⁰ See C. Perrault, *Contes*, ed. C. Magnien, Paris, 2006, p. 79.

²¹ See Heidmann and Adam, *Textualité* (n. 8 above), pp. 59–63.

Indeed, it is safe to say that in Basile’s day, Apuleius’s text had already captured the imagination of many a reader, writer and artist throughout Europe, with a multitude of editions, translations and adaptations to show for it. Is it possible that the story of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ had by then also percolated into the repertoires of storytellers in broader layers of society, so that it might have been heard somewhere on the streets and squares of Naples, read out or retold in one guise or another, perhaps for a small remuneration? Certainly. But given Basile’s background as a highly educated literary academician, a no less reasonable explanation would be that he (also) had a copy of the *Metamorphoses* in his personal library and ‘took it from there’ himself, as so many others had done before him in the past and would continue to do in the future.

Apart from Basile’s most obvious adaptations of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ in ‘Lo catenaccio’ and ‘Lo turzo d’oro, there are other elements in *Lo cunto* that seem to point in Apuleius’s direction. To begin with: Basile organizes the constituent stories of his framed tale compilation as a hermeneutically coherent whole. Of course, the main ‘geometric’ model Basile would have had in mind here is Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and the literary tradition which had sprung from it. Moreover, it may have been Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* which showed him how to construct meaningful parallels and intersections between the plotlines of his outer and inner tales. As most Apuleian scholars would agree, the tale of ‘Cupid and Psyche’, told by an off-putting proverbial old wife who is drunk, delirious and prone to anger, functions as a Platonically inspired *mise en abyme* of the encompassing adventures of Lucius, the main protagonist of the *Metamorphoses*.²² Like Psyche, Lucius falls from happiness and riches through his own misguided curiosity, suffers relentless abuse, but is eventually saved through divine grace and transformed, not from a mortal princess into a deity, but from an ass back into a human being. The other embedded tales in Apuleius also offer up thematic connections with Lucius’s unfortunate situation, as well as some good advice on how to avoid such a fate. Yet all of this is to no avail, for while Lucius is frequently intrigued and amused by the various tales which he (over)hears, he fails to grasp their pragmatic value as *fabulae de se*, stories directly concerning himself.

The frame tale of Basile’s *Cunto* likewise dramatizes the pragmatic potential of (fictive) storytelling as a way to convey wisdom and truth. When Princess Zoza manipulates her rival to invite a band of storytelling crones to the court, it is with the purpose of unmasking her as a fraud in front of Tadeo and revealing herself to be his true bride. Before she gets her turn at the very end of *Lo cunto*, the old women’s stories already hold up little fractured mirrors of the events in the frame tale, at times even prefiguring how it will end. This is also the case with ‘Lo turzo d’oro’ and ‘Lo catenaccio’: both of them relate how a beautiful girl falls for a cursed boy/prince while he is asleep, loses him because of an apparently small misstep, goes through a period of trials and tribulations, and is eventually reunited with her beloved in marriage – we might as well be talking about Zoza’s history here. ‘Lo

²² For in-depth readings of the multi-narrative, intratextual structure of the *Metamorphoses*, see esp. J. J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius’s Golden Ass*, Berkeley etc., 1985, and L. Graverini, *Literature and Identity in The Golden Ass of Apuleius*, Columbus, OH, 2007, pp. 51–132.

turzo d'oro', furthermore, duplicates the motifs of the fairy who assists the unlucky heroine in her quest and of the youth who makes his false bride pay with her life. As in the *Metamorphoses*, however, there is no indication at all that Tadeo, pleased as he is with the entertainment provided by the storytellers, is privy to the same panoptic insights which are accessible to Basile's readers. Truth will out, but only when Zoza tells it to him straight; the pragmatic power of fanciful storytelling apparently has its limitations ...

Secondly, motifs from the *Metamorphoses* pop up in several of Basile's other tales as well. For instance, in 'Le tre corone' ('The Three Crowns', day IV, tale 6), a king receives a prophecy that his unborn daughter will one day run away from him. On the intended day of her wedding, she is carried away by the wind instead and dropped off at an ogress's woodland hut (compare the divine prophecy and spiriting away of Psyche to Cupid's palace by Zephyrus in 'Cupid and Psyche'). In 'Lo serpe' ('The Serpent', day II, tale 2), yet another princess is forced to marry an actual serpent, but discovers during their wedding night that he is actually a beautiful man (compare the misinterpreted prophecy and deceitful lie of the sisters in 'Cupid and Psyche'). In 'La mortella' ('The Myrtle', day I, tale 2), a prince is visited in his bed by an unknown apparition in the dark of night. Though he first believes it might be a creature from hell, the touch of her shapely body suggests differently. After a couple of nights, he has his servants light some candles, so that he may finally gaze upon his unknown bedfellow, who turns out to be a fairy, at least as beautiful as Venus and Cupid themselves. This Apuleian scene is grotesquely inverted again at the end of the day in 'La vecchia scortecata' ('The Old Woman Who was Flayed', day I, tale 10), where a king is labouring under the false belief that he has been bedding a mysterious young girl in the dark, until he feels the saggy old skin which the shrewd biddy has bound together behind her back. An oil lamp is lit, her true appearance is discovered and she is forcibly thrown out the bedroom window, rather than flying up into the air like Apuleius's disgruntled Cupid.

Thirdly, upon a closer reading of Basile's text, it is possible to identify a number of paraphrastic reminiscences of the *Metamorphoses*, suggesting that Apuleius was never far from Basile's mind, in one way or another, as he was composing his work. None of them, however, comes as close as pure citation, which I concede does render them open to discussion. I list only a few here; but I suspect further research may bring more to light. Starting with the prince's discovery of the sleeping fairy in 'La mortella':

fatto allommare le cannele, vedde lo shiore de le belle, lo spanto de le femmene, lo schiecco, lo coccopinto de Venere, l'isce bello d'Ammore, ... vedde finalmente spettacolo da strasecolare. Le quale cose miranno, disse: 'Ora va't te 'nforna, dea Cocetrigno! ... A quale poteca de le maraveglia de la Natura se fece sta viva statola? qual Innia dette l'oro da fare sti capille? Quale Etiopia l'avolio da fravecere sta fronte? ... quale Tiro la porpora da magriare sta facce?'.²³

²³ Basile, *Cunto* (n. 1 above), p. 56.

(when the candles had been lit, he saw the flower of beauty, the wonder of women, the mirror, the painted egg of Venus, the loveliest charm of Love [Ammore], in short, he saw an astonishing spectacle. As he gazed upon all this, he said: ‘Throw yourself into the furnace already, goddess of Cyprus! ... In what workshop of the marvels of Nature was this living statue made? Which India offered up the gold to make this hair? Which Ethiopia the marble to build this forehead?... Which Tyre the crimson to stain this face?)

Psyche, too, beholds an ‘astounding spectacle’:

Sed cum primum luminis oblatione tori secreta claruerunt, videt omnium ferarum mitissimam dulcissimamque bestiam, ipsum illum Cupidinem formosum deum formonse cubantem ... dum saepius divini vultus intuetur pulchritudinem, recreatur animi.²⁴

(But as soon as she brought in the lamp to shed light on the secrets of the marital bed, she saw the gentlest, sweetest beast of all the feral creatures: handsome Cupid himself, the handsome god asleep ... As she gazed upon the beauty of his divine appearance, he spirit was revived.)

What follows then is a delicately sensuous *ekphrasis*, a description of the sleeping Cupid as if he were ‘a living statue’, with ‘capitis aurei genialem caesariem’ (‘luxuriant locks on his golden head’), ‘cervices lacteas genasque purpureas’ (‘a milky-white neck and crimson cheeks’) and a body ‘quale peperisse Venerem non paeniteret’ (‘which Venus would not have regretted giving birth to’) – unlike Basile’s ‘Cyprian goddess’, whom the spectator suggests should just go kill herself, put to shame as she is by the fairy’s superior beauty.

In ‘La schiavottella’ (‘The Slave Girl’, day II, tale 8), a portrait is painted of Jealousy as a ‘serpe che mozzeca, carola che roseca, fele che’ntosseca, neve che’ntesecca, chiuovo che smarafa, sparte-matremmonio de li guste d’Ammore, scazzellacane de li contente amorse e continue tropeia ne li mare de li piacere de Venere, la quale maie sguigliaie cosa de bene’ (‘*a serpent that bites, a woodworm that gnaws, bile that poisons, snow that renders numb, the nail that pierces, a marriage-wrecker of Love’s [Amor’s] delight, a spoil-sport of amorous joy and constant storm on the sea of Venus’s pleasures, from which nothing good has ever come*’; my italics).²⁵ Compare Apuleius’s Cupid as a ‘saevum atque ferum vipereumque malum’ and unruly boy ‘qui malis suis moribus contempta disciplina publica, flammis et sagittis armatus, per alienas domos nocte discurrens et omnium matrimonia corrumpens, impune committit tanta flagitia et nihil prorsus boni facit’²⁶ (‘a vicious, ferocious and *viperous evil* ... who in his wicked ways, in disregard of public morality, armed with flames and arrow, runs amuck at night through other peoples’ houses, *ruins everyone’s marriage*, commits countless crimes unpunished and *does absolutely nothing good*’; my italics).

²⁴ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, V.22.

²⁵ Basile, *Cunto* (n. 1 above), p. 398.

²⁶ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, IV.33 and IV.30.

When in ‘Lo turzo d’oro’, Parmetella emerges from the underground tunnel, ‘trovaie na bella chianura ne la quale era no bellissimo palazzo, che no scarpisave autro c’oro ed argento, né te deva autro’n facce che perne e prete preziose’ (‘she found a beautiful plane on which stood an exquisite palace, where one would *tread on nothing but gold and silver and see nothing but pearls and precious gems*’; my italics).²⁷ Psyche is no less dumbfounded about her new home’s splendid decorations in gold, silver and ivory, musing that ‘uehementer iterum ac saepius beatos illos qui super gemmas et monilia calcant!’ (‘Truly twice and even more blessed are those who *tread on gems and jewellery*!’; my italics)²⁸ After Parmetella has opened the forbidden box, Truone-e-lampe reprimands her: ‘“O tradetora, non vuoi proprio ‘mezzare a le spese toie che pe sta ‘mardetta coriosità sì a lo stato dove te truove?” Cossì decenno chammaie a sisco li suone e le tornaie a ‘nchiudere a la scatola, decennole che le portasse a la mamma’ (‘“O traitor, won’t you get it through your head, even as you’re *getting yourself killed*, that it is *that shit-stained curiosity* of yours that got you here?” And with these words he whistled back the instruments and returned them to the box, *telling her to bring them to his mama*’; my italics).²⁹ Just so, after Psyche’s revival, the exasperated Cupid sighs (in a register more typical of the mellifluous Apuleian tale than of its Basilean counterpart): ‘“Ecce” inquit “*rursum perieras, misella, simili curiositate*. Sed interim quidem tu provinciam *quae tibi matris meae praecepto mandata est exsequere naviter*” ’ (‘“Just look at that”, he said, “you almost *got yourself killed* again, you wretched girl, because of *that same-old curiosity*. But quickly now, *go complete the task set for you on my mother’s orders*” ’; my italics).³⁰

If You Have Read the Tale

So far, I have argued for the likelihood of Basile’s direct engagement with Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*, on account of both its great popularity in early modern Europe and its scattered presence in *Lo cunto* beyond the plot-lines of the two *cunti* under discussion here. Yet even just the first part of my argumentation should suffice to establish that this ancient text would have been a self-evident, highly recognizable point of reference, not just for Basile himself, but also for his readers in the Neapolitan elite. In what remains, I will return to ‘Lo catenaccio’ and ‘Lo turzo d’oro’ and outline how these two adaptations reflect Basile’s more general writerly approach to his various sources in classical literature, on a grander scale than is usually the case in *Lo cunto*.

Considered by themselves, the plot summaries offered at the beginning of this article might still give the impression that we are dealing here with a collection not wholly unlike that of the Brothers Grimm. While many a present-day reader’s horizon of expectations regarding fairy tales tends to be determined primarily by the

²⁷ Basile, *Cunto* (n. 1 above), p. 926.

²⁸ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, V.4.

²⁹ Basile, *Cunto* (n. 1 above), pp. 936–7.

³⁰ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, VI.21.

Grimm ‘brand’ (and that of the Disney Corporation), the genre’s extensive literary tradition is, in fact, characterized by a great diversity in terms of narrative materials, style, complexity, genericity and intended audience. An excellent case in point is Basile’s *Cunto*, which, on a direct reading, turns out to be far removed from the (pseudo-)naïve, quaint, folksy and family-friendly tales to which we have grown so accustomed. Rather, it is a piece of sophisticated Baroque art which takes the reader on a fast ride between the high and the low, the popular and the elitist, frequently with dizzying and hilarious effects. Within the span of just one tale, we may find ourselves speeding through a plethora of generic markers, tropes, images, themes, story structures and even phrases from classical epic, fable, Ovidian myth, medieval *exempla* and courtly romance, Renaissance *novelle* and lyric, contemporaneous literatures, elements from local tales, jokes, children’s games, bawdy street-slang and so on. In that sense, the collection’s subtitle ‘Entertainment for the Little Ones’ can be quite misleading.

Crucial to Basile’s artistic project in *Lo cunto* is his adherence to the combined principles of *imitatio* and *variatio*, creating original variations on well-known materials and themes and often multiplying them throughout his work.³¹ This is already the case on the level of the frame tale, which constitutes an innovative take on the centuries-old and widely adapted Boccaccian model: instead of a relatively realistic account, with refined, beautiful young men and women sharing light-hearted *novelle*, here we have a marvellous fairy tale-like adventure in which crude and ugly old wives tell tales laced with magic, monstrosity and profanity. We recognize a similar creative approach in Basile’s abundant dealings with the characters, stories and conventions of classical literature.

A first apt illustration of this is his use of lengthy similes and metaphors to describe the movements of the sun, in itself a topical marker of (classical) epic and lyrical texts. Basile pushes it to the limit, so that no single sunrise or sunset in *Lo cunto* goes without some embellishment, and never in the same manner.³² At times, he remains fairly classical, as in ‘la parze ogn’ora mille anne che se corcasse lo Sole a lo lietto d’argiento che l’apparacchia lo shiumo de l’Innia’ (‘each hour seemed a thousand years before the Sun retreated to the silvery bed made by the river of India’).³³ Frequently, he opts for a more Baroque contrivance: ‘quanno se levaie la tela dell’ombre da la scena de lo cielo, pe scire l’Aurora a fare lo prolaco de la tragedia de la Notte’ (‘when the curtain of shadows was lifted from the stage of heaven, so as to let Aurora know she could initiate the prologue to the Tragedy of Night’).³⁴ And then every few pages, he catches the reader off-guard with phrases such as ‘commenzanno lo Sole comm’a pottana falluta a cagnare quartiere’ (‘the Sun began to change quarters like an unsuccessful whore’), and ‘quanno esce Aurora a iettare l’aurinale de lo vecchio suoi tutto arenella rossa a la fenestra

³¹ I am much indebted here to Canepa’s excellent study in *From Court* (n. 2 above), pp. 22, 57, 63, 91 and passim.

³² See *Ibid.*, pp. 238–46.

³³ Basile, *Cunto* (n. 1 above), p. 624.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

d'Oriente' ('when Aurora goes out to the eastern window to empty out her old man's piss-pot, full of reddish grains of sand').³⁵

As these examples show, Basile's use of the classics often involves some form of humorous mockery and grotesque deflation. Accordingly, in one of his tales (day III, tale 5) he perversely manages to insert a reference to the agonizing death of Queen Dido from the *Aeneid* (alongside quotations from dulcet Petrarchan lyric) in a scene of explosive diarrhoea in the marital bed. Elsewhere (day V, tale 1), a prince relieves himself in a back-alley and attempts to wipe his bottom with what he assumes to be a dead goose. The bird suddenly wakes up and viciously bites the royal buttocks. Quirkily evoking a mythological image, Basile continues: 'corzero tuttle li serviture e, volennola sciccare da la carne, non fu possibile, che s'era attaccato comme na Sarmace de penne a n'Ermafrodito de pilo' ('the servants came running and tried to pry the goose off his flesh, but it was impossible, for it had attached itself to him like a feathery Salmacis to a hairy Hermaphroditus').³⁶ In a third tale (day I, tale 9), a queen who cannot conceive children is recommended to eat the heart of a sea-dragon, after which she instantly becomes pregnant. Basile winkingly reassures the more experienced reader: 'No te maravigliare ... ca se lieie la favola, truove che a Gionone passanno pe li campe Olane sopra no shiore l'abbottaie la panza e figliaie' ('No need to be amazed ..., for if you have read the tale, you will find that after brushing against a flower in the Olean fields, Juno's belly swelled up and she gave birth')³⁷ – a classical mythological motif (see Ovid, *Fasti* V.229–58) which also makes a second appearance in another one of the *cunti* (day II, tale 8), where a girl is impregnated by swallowing a rose petal.

A similar dressing down/up of classical literature takes place in Basile's rewritings of 'Cupid and Psyche' as 'Lo catenaccio' and 'Lo turzo d'oro', but on a macro-level. Firstly, he sets up a comical intertextual tension by turning an illustrious Latin *fabula* about the interactions of royals and gods into two strange Neapolitan *cunti* filled with peasants, fairies, ogres, overdressed monkeys and the like. In the process, the god of Love Cupid becomes a cursed slave or an ogress's son, Princess Psyche a farm girl, seductive Venus a foul-mouthed cannibalistic monster with sagging breasts carried 'like saddlebags over her shoulders',³⁸ and mighty three-headed Cerberus a common bloodhound – not unlike how Salmacis and Hermaphroditus are projected onto a ludicrously exposed prince and his avian attaché, or how rosy Aurora is reduced to disposing of reddish geriatric urine.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 326, 246.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 892.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 184.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 932. As Maggi also points out in *Preserving the Spell* (n. 3 above), pp. 49–50, the transformation of Venus and Proserpine into two ogresses might actually be a clever wink of Basile at the Apuleian text itself: when Psyche first arrives at Venus's palace, the latter's servant Consuetudo ('Habit') roughly pulls her inside by the hair, crying: 'inter Orci caneros iam ipsos haesisti' (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, VI.8), 'You are stuck between the very jaws of Orcus.' Later on, Venus sends her to Proserpine with the words: 'ipsius Orci ferales penates te derige' (ibid., VI.16), 'Guide your steps to the deathly house of Orcus.' Apart from being a Roman god of the Underworld, to which he lends his name, Orcus is also the forefather of the monstrous *orco* or 'ogre' in Italian wonder tales.

I would like to draw out a further, cross-medial parallel with a sculpture by one of Basile’s contemporaries, Ippolito Buzio. The marble group in question (1621–1624), now in the Palazzo Altemps in Rome, represents the couple of Cupid and Psyche, with Cupid pointing towards the heavens, and Psyche towards her lover’s heart. Buzio created this piece by visibly altering large fragments of classical sculptures and combining them with Baroque portions executed by himself. Yet there is something conspicuously strange and unbalanced about the result: while Psyche’s unusually robust chest and head once used to belong to a male Apollonian figure, Cupid’s head is actually that of a Sappho-like woman. As Matilde De Angelis D’Ossat observes, the resulting effect of playful androgynous ambiguity is typically Baroque, meant to induce surprise and wonder in the spectator.³⁹ In similar fashion, Basile composed his own renditions of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ by irreverently imitating a classical text and infusing it with distinctly un-classical elements – some of which might very well have a folkloric provenance! – to attain a novel, hybrid and rambunctious form of literary *meraviglia* which is even more surprising than Buzio’s odd-looking statue.

Secondly, Basile’s rewriting of Apuleius’s plot is not limited to one instance, but is repeated and, more importantly, varied. In Luciella’s story, for example, he includes the ploy of the envious sisters (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, V.7–V.21), only to leave it out in Parnetella’s. Conversely, he completely omits the long episode detailing Psyche’s tasks (ibid., VI.10–VI.22) in Luciella’s story,⁴⁰ except perhaps for a passing allusion: as the reunion of the queen and her long lost son draws near, we read ‘tornanno la sera chillo medesimo giovane, la regina, che steva sopra la fiero e no scelieva nemmiccole, reconascette ch’era lo figlio e l’abbracciaie strettamente’ (‘when the same young man returned that night, the queen, who stood by armed and ready and was *not wasting her time sorting lentils*, realized it was her son and she embraced him firmly’, my italics).⁴¹ Regardless of whether or not ‘sorting lentils’ may have been a common proverbial expression in seventeenth-century Naples, it immediately brings to mind the first of Psyche’s tasks in the household of Venus, to which Basile elaborately returns in ‘Lo turzo d’oro’ (compare his remark regarding Venus’s flowery pregnancy in day I, tale 9, anticipating the events in day II, tale 8). There are also various smaller variations in the details, such as the home situation of the protagonists (compare ‘Cupid and Psyche’: rich couple/‘Lo catenaccio’: poor mother/‘Lo turzo d’oro’: poor father) and their relationship to their siblings and in-laws (compare ‘Cupid and Psyche’: incorrigibly wicked sisters and placated mother-in-law/‘Lo catenaccio’: incorrigibly wicked sisters and benevolent mother-in-law/‘Lo turzo d’oro’: placated sisters-in-law and incorrigibly wicked mother-in-law).

³⁹ See M. De Angelis D’Ossat, ‘Gruppo di Amore e Psyche’, in *Palazzo Altemps: Le collezioni*, Milan, 2014, p. 216. On the subject of Baroque restorations and modernisations of classical sculptures, also see J. Montagu, ‘Chapter VII: The Influence of the Baroque on Classical Antiquity’, in *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art*, New Haven and London, 1989, pp. 151–72.

⁴⁰ This was already pointed out by Jacob Grimm in his preface to *Der Pentamerone, oder Das Märchen aller Märchen von Giambattista Basile*, transl. Felix Liebrecht, I, Breslau, 1846, p. xi.

⁴¹ Basile, *Cunto* (n. 1 above), p. 416.

Of course, the reader also needs to take into consideration Basile's creative recycling of Apuleian motifs in other tales of the *Cunto*. This includes two further variations on the 'sleeping Cupid' scene, discussed above, which brings the total up to four:

'Cupid & Psyche'	'Mortella' (I.2)	'Vecchia' (I.10)	'Catenaccio' (II.9)	'Turzo' (V.4)
Princess believes she shares the bed with a monster, lights an oil lamp, finds a beautiful god asleep	Prince believes he might share the bed with a demon, lights candles, finds a beautiful fairy asleep	King believes he shares the bed with a young girl, lights oil lamp, finds an ugly crone asleep	Poor girl believes she shares the bed with a cursed man, lights a candle, finds a beautiful and indeed cursed man asleep	Poor girl believes she shares the bed with a black slave, lights a candle, finds a beautiful, cursed white man asleep

Basile thus frequently invites his audience to oscillate between different versions of similar narrative 'facts' and to take pleasure in the repeated metamorphoses in the inter- and intratextual overlaps, an oscillation which becomes all the more poignant if those readers also know their Apuleius. Only 'if you have read the tale' does it become possible to appreciate fully the Baroque acrobatics and storytelling carnival staged throughout *Lo cunto*.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Giambattista Basile's 'Lo catenaccio' and 'Lo turzo d'oro', though regularly associated with oral folklore, are likely to be direct rewritings of Apuleius's 'Cupid and Psyche.' Moreover, this intertextual connection is not just a matter of 'inspiration' or 'indebtedness', but part of a more elaborate Baroque game of literary transformation and hybridity which lies at the heart of *Lo cunto de li cunti*, a game which also encompasses the classical tradition. This is but one of many examples in which premodern Latin literature has had a direct impact on the work of fairy-tale authors from early modernity onwards, an area of research which is still in the process of transcending the world of artificially constructed tale types and anachronistic projections. Meanwhile, the texts are there, waiting to be read into one another, just as their earliest audiences would have done, once upon a time.

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