Fairytales—A World between the Imaginary

Fairytales—A World between the Imaginary: Metaphor at Play in "Lo *cunto* de li cunti" by Giambattista Basile

By

Carmela Bernadetta Scala

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

Fairytales—A World between the Imaginary:
Metaphor at Play in "Lo *cunto* de li cunti" by Giambattista Basile,
by Carmela Bernadetta Scala

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-6205-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-6205-9

To my mentor, my teacher and above all my friend
To you, Professor DiScipio...
Thanks for all you have done for me.
You will forever live in my heart!

CONTENTS

Foreword ix

Introduction 1
A Historical Overview of Storytelling

Chapter One 7
Lo *cunto* de li cunti between Tradition and Innovation

Chapter Two 41
The Baroque Metaphor and the Metaphor in Basile
(as it applies to certain characters)

Chapter Three 95
The Androgynous in Basile's cunti

Chapter Four 133
Fairytales In and Out of Time

Appendix 171

Endnotes 177

Images 201

Bibliography 207

FOREWORD

Once upon a time there was Lo *cunto* de li cunti, an intriguing collection of fairytales, written in the Neapolitan dialect, destined to become a milestone in the establishment of the fairytale as a genre. This book proposes a detailed analysis of how Basile uses and manipulates metaphors, not only to stimulate the wonderment of his readers but also to vocalize his discontent with society. It also explores the link between Basile and the tradition that came before him, as well as his influence on posterity.

Lo *cunto* de li cunti (1634-36) is an endless resource for both scholars interested in folklore and in the studies of metaphors. The text is extremely rich and Basile exhibits not only a profound knowledge of Neapolitan traditions, he also demonstrates his familiarity with European and Oriental mores which he mixes and reinterprets in his collection (see chapter 1). His creativity, however, explodes in the creation of the metaphors which permeate the entire book.

Basile's scholars have been intrigued by the vast number of metaphors, and especially by the diversity of those that describe the alternation of day and night in Lo *cunto*. Croce states that in Basile "the sun doesn't simply rise", there is always a story to be told to describe its cycle. Michele Rak then defines these descriptions as "*microracconti del tempo*", as they present their own tales in which the sun and the moon are "transformed" into animated characters that interact, creating movement and actions. In this book, while acknowledging the previous scholarship, I have integrated the study on metaphors, emphasizing how Basile employs metaphors not only to describe the alternation between night and day, but also to depict every single aspect of life. In *Lo cunto*, for example, food and the act of consuming it become metaphors to talk about power and wealth (and the wrong distribution of it), or about sex and beauty; food is also employed as the "element" that unties the knots of the plot. Furthermore, names are invested with significant meanings which hint at the qualities, or the lack of them, of the protagonists. (See chapter 2.)

The real innovation I have found in the collection (which also represents the novelty that this work brings to Basile's scholarship) is in the description of the female protagonists of the tales, often depicted as androgynous beings who hold both female and male characteristics which

grant them a perfectly balanced personality where *animus* and *anima* are harmoniously intertwined. Of particular interest is the way Basile expresses through them his utopian dream of a more balanced and just society. (See chapter 3.)

Basile has also the merit of having established a "legacy" of writers who have looked at his collection as a model to emulate. Indeed, some of the greatest European fairytales writers of the past have looked to *Lo cunto* as a reference and a resource: among them there are Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. The fascination with fairytales and their enchanted world continues even today, as the large number of authors who still write in this genre testifies; it has also captivated the universe of performing arts and in particular the movie industry. Walt Disney, for example, has built his career based on the production of fairytale movies, and often he has added his own "twist" to the stories, making them more modern and attractive to the current generation. (See chapter 4.)

There are three main characters of the frame tale which forms the overarching narrative of Basile's *Lo cunto de li Cunti*. These characters are referred to throughout this volume. They are:

Zoza: A princess, brought up in Valle Pelosa (the Hairy Valley) who, for the first part of the tale, never laughs. She is the main protagonist of this tale, who goes forth on adventures to find her prince (Tadeo).

Tadeo: The prince (and later, king) of Round Field (Campo Rotondo), who for the first part of the tale lies in the wood in an enchanted sleep, awaiting a princess (Zoza) to wake him up with her tears. When he is awoken, however, he confuses his rescuer with a Moorish slave girl called Lucia, whom he then marries.

Lucia: A Moorish slave; the usurper, a fake princess who tries to steal Tadeo from Zoza.

INTRODUCTION

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF STORY TELLING

> *Non è chiù cosa goliosa a lo munno,magne femmene meie, quanto lo sentire li fatti d'autro, né senza ragione veduta chillo gran felosofo mese l'utema felicità dell'ommo in sentire cunte piacevole*[1]
>
> *There is nothing in the world more delicious, my illustrious women, than to hear about the doings of others, nor without obvious reason did that great philosopher set the supreme happiness of man in hearing pleasant tales.*

The telling of stories is one of the oldest pastimes in existence, and it belongs to the earliest societies as well as to very complex and modern ones. Often the stories were passed down from one generation to the other orally, and from this originated the long literary tradition of folktales, myths, and legends based upon the protagonists and the subject matter of the narrative. The fairytale actually originates from this oral tradition and, indeed, it takes elements from all of the above. In fact, some of the most famous literary fairytales such as *Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Story of the Three Little Pigs,* were originally folktales. Furthermore, many motifs pertaining to myth and legends, such as the extreme sacrifice of the hero or heroine, the legend of Robin Hood, the thief who stole to give to the poor (echoed in Straparola's "Cassandrino the Thief") are recycled and reshaped in literary fairy tales.

As to when and how the literary fairytale did exactly originate, or how it spread and became a literary genre, there is no real certainty. Calvino states,

> Datare una fiaba è arbitrario, se non con un'approssimazione di secoli, quando non di milenni[2]

Jack Zipes agrees and also tries to explain why fairytales cannot be "dated". He writes,

> It is next to impossible because the fairytale is similar to a mysterious biological species that appeared at one point in history, began to evolve

> almost naturally, and has continued to transform itself vigorously to the present day.[3]

Nevertheless, we can safely say that a fairytale is the "written form" of folktales featuring the presence of enchanted princes and princesses, kings and queens, and many characters belonging to the supernatural such as fairies, ogres, elves, goblins, as well as talking animals and plants, all borrowed from the universe of fables. It is also safe to assume that we can trace the origin of fairytales to before the appearance of *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius; indeed the story of Psyche and Cupid could be considered one of the oldest examples of the genre. Certainly the genre already existed before the discovery and translation of the *Arabian Nights*, by Antoine Galland (1704-1717); in fact, the Italian author Giovan Francesco Straparola had included fairytales in his collection of *novella, Le Piacevoli Notti* (1550-53). This genre, despite its artistry, had long been ignored, and resurfaced in Europe only during the seventeenth century thanks, especially, to the work of Gianbattista Basile (c. 1575), author of *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1634-36) and Charles Perrault, who in the writing of his *Contes* (1697) borrowed from Basile, though adapting the material to his own characteristics and his French culture. Also important was the contribution of Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier with *Oeuvres meslées* (1696); Madame d'Alnoy, with *L'ile de la félicité* (1660) and *Les Contes de fée* (1698); Jean de Mailly with *Les illustres fée* (1698); and Henriette Julie Murat with *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques* (1699), among other French fairytale writers of the time. Subsequently, the work of the German folklorists the Brothers Grimm, *Children's and Household Tales* (1812-15) was fundamental in the emergence of the modern literary fairytale.[4] In Italy, as Calvino suggests in *Le Fiabe Italiane* (1980), the most important contributions came from Gherardo Nerucci with *Sessanta novella popolari montalesi* (1880), a collection of sixty tales written in Tuscan (specifically "pistoiese") dialect, and from Giuseppe Pitrè, one of the most important Italian folklorist, author of a great collection of Sicilian tales *Fiabe novelle popolari e racconti siciliani* (1875)[5].

However, it is *Lo cunto de li cunti, overo lo trattenemiento de peccerille* that represents the first integral collection of fairytales, not only in Italy but also in Western Europe in general. This literary masterpiece, written in Neapolitan dialect, had a short-lived success right after it was published, but subsequently it was largely ignored. Nancy Canepa has defined *Lo cunto de li Cunti* as the "Cinderella of literary history" thus emphasizing the fact that, despite its grandiosity, this book has for a long time been left in the shadow in Italy, more so than in other countries. As a matter of fact, the first modern, integral, and annotated translation of

Basile's masterpiece, which was published posthumously in 1634-36, was issued in Italy only in 1925 thanks to Benedetto Croce, who greatly admired Basile and considered *Lo cunto* a masterpiece that illuminated the Baroque period. Croce declared Basile's collection as

> the greatest literary work of the Baroque because in it the Baroque executes a merry dance and appears on the verge of dissolving: before Basile the Baroque was torpid; with him it has become limpid gaiety.[6]

Prior to Croce's translation, there had been other translations in Italy (six anonymous translations to be exact) but none of them was as complete; in Europe exemplary translations were circulating as early as the first half of the nineteenth century; indeed *Lo cunto* was first translated integrally into German in 1846 by Felix Liebrecht, while the first English translation appeared in 1848 by John Edward Taylor.

According to Canepa, there are four possible causes for the limited success of the book. First she believes, and I concur, that one of the biggest impediments to a better reception of Basile's work was the dialect employed. Basile, who was a courtier and a renowned "Tuscan" writer of his time[7], decided to write *Lo cunto de li cunti* in the Neapolitan dialect, which made the book intelligible only to a limited group of people. The second reason, she adduces, is the natural negative disposition that the Italian literary world has long had towards the Baroque period and its artistic productions, an attitude that has changed only in the last few decades. Furthermore, the scant success of *Lo cunto* was due to a general misunderstanding by the early modern world in that it identified fairytales with children's literature, which was actually recognized as a genre only in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century[8]. Modern scholarship, however, has finally agreed that *Lo cunto de li cunti, overo lo trattenemiento de' peccerille* was intended for an adult audience, namely the courtiers and friends of the author to whom he probably read parts of the book before it was even finished. This approach justifies and explains the language, which is often coarse, vulgar or complicated by myriads of metaphors, hyperboles and by all the elements typical of Baroque prose, but still leaves doubts as to how to interpret the subtitle of the text. The most plausible explanation for the subtitle is that by *peccerille* Basile meant the simple people, the populace, considered "little" when compared to the inhabitants of the court or the members of the higher classes for whom the *cunti* were recited.

Canepa also attributes the low popularity of *Lo cunto* to its hybrid nature, writing:

> Furthermore, *Lo Cunto* occupies the somewhat paradoxical position of being the fairy-tale collection that is, at the same time, both the closest to its origins in the oral folktale and the most stylized and artistically sophisticated of all these collections.[9]

I believe that another plausible reason for the lack of success of *Lo cunto* is its polemical and quarrelsome attitude towards the courtly society. Indeed, *Lo cunto* can be read as a harsh critique of the society of Basile's time, and this probably affected the way people reacted to it negatively.[10]

Ironically, it is this hybrid composition of the collection, together with its Baroque stylistic features, and also the vividness and vitality of its Neapolitan language, that makes *Lo cunto de li cunti* an original and unparalleled masterpiece, once the barriers posed by the language and the censorious viewpoint towards the Baroque have been banished. As such, it has become the subject of numerous scholarly studies that have investigated the relationship between Basile's text and the narrative tradition, highlighting both the debt of the Neapolitan author to this tradition and the innovation he brought to the writing of tales.

We shall now continue our brief journey through the history of storytelling in Italy so that we may better understand Basile's "real" debt to tradition.

In Italy the tradition of storytelling dates back to the medieval *exemplum* and anecdotes, which were told with no artistic pretension but just for the fun of revealing something new (*nova* in Provençal, from which the word *novella* originated in the West). Many of the plots for the anecdotes came from the Orient, as told by the merchants who used to travel back and forth, importing into Italy not only material goods but also fragments of Indian and Arabic culture; it was through the Indian literary tradition that the device of the *cornice,* the frame tale, was introduced. The oriental *cornice* differed a lot from the later form developed by Boccaccio (1315-1375) who, in the fourteenth century, wrote his masterpiece the *Decameron* (c.1350), to which Basile's work, as we will discuss later, has often been compared. The Oriental *cornice* was a kind of circular tale that would "embrace" the different tales that made up the collection; an example of it is found in the aforementioned *Arabian Nights*, in which the *cornice* is actually the originating tale, which opens and closes the narrative, and from which the entire collection of tales springs. Instead, in the *Decameron* the *cornice* is an independent story whose only purpose is to provide a setting for the *brigata,* made up of ten young aristocrats so that they can conveniently spend their time "*novellando*" (telling stories). Basile's *cornice*, as we will see, replicates the frame-tale style of the *Arabian Nights* more than that of the *Decameron.* Furthermore, the

influence of Indian and Arabic culture on European narrative is testified to by the popularity of some tales collections such as *Il libro dei sette savi* and *Libro di Calila e Dimna*, which were amply translated and rewritten. These oriental collections provided a great source of themes and motifs for the Italian *novelle*; however, what made them so successful in Europe were their brevity and their moral content, which were in perfect harmony with the western tradition of *exempla* (for example, moral tales).[11]

The transition from the *brevitas* of the exempla to the extended *novella* took quite a while, and it started with the rewriting in the vernacular of some of the most popular tale collections. Besides translating the tales from Latin, the authors also added details to the stories making them more realistic, with a typical popular taste. Furthermore, the tales became more dialogic as dialogues came to occupy the majority of the narrative text. All of these innovations are found in the *Novellino,* a collection of one hundred tales[12] that appeared in Italy towards the end of the thirteenth century. The author (or authors), as well as the editor of the collection, are unknown, but they were certainly Florentines, as the language of the tales testifies. The topics of the tales were not always original; some of them indeed derived from the old Latin and medieval tradition; the stories were written in a simple style, both from a strictly grammatical point of view and a stylistic one. Indeed, the space dedicated to the description of the psychology of the protagonists, or of the environment where the stories were set, is very limited; the simplicity of the *Novellino* made it easy to read and granted its popularity, and it represents one of the most significant pre-*Decameron* milestones in the development of the literary Italian *novella*. The appearance of the *Decameron* marks the "birth" of the modern Italian *novella*; with the *Novellino,* in fact, given the brevity of the tales and the lack of details, we were still in the realm of the exemplum. Boccaccio stretches the length of the *novella* and embellishes it with a more sophisticated prose and plenty of details both on the psychology of his protagonists and on the places where his stories are set. After the *Decameron* came the *Trecentonovelle* by Franco Sacchetti (c. 1335) and the *Novelliere* by Giovanni Sercambi (1347-1424), two collections based on the Boccacian tradition. Giovanni Sercambi will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, as I believe that he might have had a strong influence on Basile, even though this influence has been overlooked by many scholars who preferred to concentrate on the more obvious influence of Boccaccio and Straparola.

The tradition of storytelling in the 1400s penetrated the epic narrative, which recovered many of the fairytale motifs present in the earlier tradition of the *cantari.* Indeed, in 1483 Luigi Pulci wrote his comic epic

Morgante, in which we can identify many common fairytale themes, as well as protagonists such as dragons and wild men who resemble somewhat the ogre of fairytales, and indeed the story of "Florinetta" has many similarities with two of Basile's *cunti* "The Flea" (1.5) and "Cannetella" (3.1). Also of the fifteenth century is Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (1495), in which we find many ogres, fairies, and all sorts of "magical" happenings. Finally, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* is rich in fairytales elements[13], *episodes*, and characters: one only needs to think of Astolfo who goes to the moon to recuperate Orlando's "wits", or of Alcina, the *maga* (witch) who enchants all knights who enter her castle[14]. This tradition continues through the Renaissance, when the imitation of the Boccaccian *novella* continued to flourish, if only during the first half of the century; subsequently, the discovery of the Aesopian fables aroused strong interest and provided new subject matter for the narrations. The first collection of tales that incorporated not only the traditional *novellas* but also the first rudimentary example of "real" fairytales was *Le piacevoli notti* (*The pleasant nights*) by Giovan Francesco Straparola, which appeared in 1530-33. It definitely had an important influence on Basile, and also on Perrault and other French writers of the time, as well as on the Brothers Grimm. After Straparola came the one who, we believe, could be considered the *father* of literary fairytale: Giambattista Basile, whose work unquestionably designates the passage from the oral folk tale to the "authored" and sophisticated literary version of such tales. This is a concise history of the tradition before Basile, but what exactly does Basile owe to his predecessors? We shall find out in the next chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

LO *CUNTO* DE LI CUNTI BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

> *Everything that has once occurred seeks to recur. It is up to us to evaluate repetitions as positive or negative, to reject some as inappropriate, undesirable, or pointless, and to recognize others as life-giving, life-supporting, or structure-creating. One person imitates the other, partially with justification ... and partially illegitimately, for, within the limitations of established restrictions, man is called upon to exercise his freedom*.[15]
> (Max Luthi)

The structure of *Lo cunto* has received much attention due to its noticeable resemblance, in this respect, to Boccaccio's *Decameron.* Indeed, Basile's work is often referred to as the *Pentamerone*, and Croce was among the first scholars to use this term in the introduction to his translation of *Lo cunto,* where he writes:

> Dopo queste *Muse napolitane*, o ad una con esse, il Basile disegnò più vasta tela, che fu di raccogliere in una sorta di decamerone il tesoro delle fiabe popolari che si narravano a Napoli*:* un <<pentamerone>>, veramente, perchè le fiabe sarebbero state cinquanta e divise in cinque giornate
>
> [After the *Muse napolitane,* or at the same time he was writing them, Basile had a greater project which was to collect in a sort of Decameron-like collection the treasure of popular fairytales narrated in Naples: a "pentamerone", really, as the fairytales would have been fifty divided over five days][16]

Michelangelo Picone deals with this issue in his essay *La Cornice Novellistica dal "Decameron" al "Pentamerone"* which clearly illustrates the similarities but also the many differences between these two masterpieces of Italian literature, and in the end recognizes Basile as the Neapolitan Boccaccio, who showed reverence but not submission to the great master and thus created his own original work of art. While this might seem evident today, in the past the collection of Neapolitan

fairytales was reputed to be an imitation or a parody of the *Decameron*; as an imitation it has been severely criticized and has often been considered far inferior to Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Particularly harsh in his judgment of *Lo cunto* was Ferdinando Galiani, who wrote the following about Basile:

> A costui venne disgraziatamente per noi il capriccio di contraffare l'incomparabile *Decamerone* di Giovanni Boccaccio, e comporre un <<pentamerone>> da lui intitolato *Lo cunto de li cunti* nel dialetto napoletano, e così divenire il Boccaccio, o sia il testo di esso. A tanta impresa mancavagli intieramente i talenti per eseguirla. Privo in tutto e di genio elevato e di filosofia e di felicità d'invenzione e di richezza di cognizioni a potere immaginare e adornare novelle graziose o interessanti o tragiche o lepide o morali, altro non seppe pensare che d'accozzare raccconti di fate e dell'orco così insipidi, mostruosi e sconci, che gli stessi arabi, fondatori di questo depravatissimo gusto, si sarebbero arrositi d'avergli immaginati. Alla stupidità dell'invenzione corrisponde la mostruosità dello stile. Prefissosi di contraffare il Boccaccio, non solo ne imita servilmente le introduzioni e le conclusioni delle novelle e delle giornate, ma ne imita spesso il contorno de' periodi e talvolta la sintassi. Or un periodo sullo stile del Boccaccio, messo in bassissimo napoletano ed aggiuntavi ad arte la più laida e forzata caricatura diviene cosa così nauseosa che è impossibile leggerlo, anche a stomaco digiuno, e non vomitare.
>
> [Unfortunately for us this fellow had the whim to counterfeit the incomparable *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, and he wrote a "pentamerone" in Neapolitan dialect titled *Lo cunto de li cunti,* and by doing so he wanted to imitate Boccaccio, or more precisely his text. However, he lacked the talent to realize such endeavor. He lacked everything: skill, philosophy, inventiveness and richness in thinking and imagination. He was unable to imagine and adorn gracious, interesting, tragic, witty or moral novellas; he was only able to conceive and huddle tales of fairies and ogres so dull, monstrous and obscene, that the same Arabs, who had invented this unfortunate genre, would have blushed had they read them. The monstrosity of the style corresponds to the stupidity of the invention. This fellow, who had put his mind to the idea of counterfeiting Boccaccio, does not simply imitate the introductions and the conclusions of the tales and the days, but often imitates the structure of the sentences and the syntax. However a sentence written in the Boccaccio's style, once written in Neapolitan, becomes loaded with the most obscene and forced caricature, it becomes so annoying that it is impossible to read it without vomiting even on an empty stomach][17]

Clearly this judgment of Basile is strongly influenced by the negative attitude toward the Baroque period and toward the dialect literature typical of the Enlightenment. The truth is that Basile, while refusing to passively imitate the so called canonical traditions, had no intention to ridicule or negate them in favor of the more modern trends. On the contrary, as Getto says, Basile favored both styles and probably, while working on *Lo cunto,* had in mind both "the perfection of Boccaccio's model" and the need to experiment and innovate, "the inclination towards the eccentric", proper of the Baroque.[18] Basile did not simply write a book of tales: rather he brought forth a completely new genre, namely the genre of fairytales, and being a pioneer it allotted him the freedom to play with the language, the narrative style and the structures, satisfying all the impulses of his restless creative genius.

Basile looked at the *Decameron* with a critical eye and borrowed themes from it, for example the *cunto* "Sapia" (5.6) has a strong resemblance to *Decameron* 3.9; in both stories, the women, Sapia[19] and Giletta di Norbona respectively, conquer their lovers thanks to their endeavors and ingenuity. More generally, Basile often uses the exemplum of Griselda (*Decameron* 10.10) for his heroines who patiently endure maltreatments longer than a normal human being could do, as happens, for example, in "La schiavetta" (The Little Slave Girl, 2.8). In this tale, a jealous aunt is consumed with envy after entering "the forbidden" room and finding in there the beautiful Lisa[20], her husband's niece, who awakens after she had fallen asleep, almost as if she was dead, due to an enchantment:

> <<Và, ca te voglio dare mamma e tata!>> respose la baronessa e, 'nfelata comm'a schiava, arraggiata comm'e cana figliata, 'ntossecosa comm'a serpe, le tagliaie subeto li capille e facennole na 'ntosa de zuco le mese no vestito stracciato ed ogne iuorno le carrecava vrognole a lo caruso, molegnane all'uocchie, mierche'n face, facennole la vocca comm'avesse magnato pecciune crude. (Rak, 402)
>
> "Come on, I'll give you mommy and daddy!" answered the baroness and, as full of bile as a slave, as angry as a bitch that had just pupped, as full of poison as a serpent, she immediately cut off Lisa's hair, gave her a juicy beating, put her in a ragged dress, and *every day unloaded lumps on her head, eggplants on her eyes, brands on her face, and gave her a mouth that looked like she had eaten raw pigeons*. (Canepa, 197. Emphasis is mine)

In the *Decameron,* there is another tale of particular interest that may have influenced Basile, if in a more subtle way, and this is the story of Nastagio degli Onesti (5.8)[21], which is echoed in Basile's "La superbia punita"

(Pride Punished, 4.10). The resemblance of these two tales, though not as evident as in the examples given above, is significant. The common trait in the two *novelle* is the idea of the punishment of the unworthy and ungrateful woman who rejects and ridicules the love of a fine gentleman. In fact, in the tale of Nastagio degli Onesti we find a young gentleman who has inherited a great fortune from his father and his uncle, and falls in love with a "a girl of far more noble lineage than his own, whose love he hoped to win by dint of his accomplishments."[22] The girl, however, rejects and ridicules all his attempts to woo her. In the end, Nastagio gains the love, or at least the devotion, of his beloved without punishing her directly, by showing her through a mirror image what could happen to her if she continues to be wicked and cruel. This tale is also interesting for the supernatural elements it features.

In Basile the protagonist of the tale "Il re di Belpaese" (The king of Lovely Land), also falls in love with an extraordinarily beautiful wicked girl:

> Cinziella, bella comme na luna, ma non aveva drama de bellezza che non fosse contrapesata da na livra de soperbia. (Rak, 838)
>
> Cinziella … was as beautiful as the moon, but she hadn't a dram of beauty that wasn't counterbalanced by a pound of pride. (Canepa, 371)

Like Nastagio, he tries by all means possible to win her love, but in the end he gives up and leaves her kingdom, swearing to come back and take revenge on her; and so he does. His revenge ends only when the queen mother talks some sense into him and softens his heart by showing him the two beautiful children the princess has given birth to.

Basile knew the *Decameron* well and found some sort of inspiration in it; however he had no intention of "contraffare" (counterfeiting, as Galiani suggested), the Florentine masterpiece. Indeed, even if the structure of the *cunto* may appear, at first glance, to be a faithful copy of Boccaccio's collection, under closer inspection it reveals a strong incongruence with its "progenitor". The first evident difference between the two, as noted above, is found in the structure of the frame tale. The *cornice* in the *Decameron* represents a tale in and by itself, in which the author informs the reader of the background of the ten tellers and contextualizes the stories and the events of the deadly plague that afflicted Florence in 1348, leading to the decision to leave Florence and take refuge in a villa in the country. The narrative of the *cornice*, furthermore, links all the other stories together, as it provides for them a common reason to exist. The *brigata* came together

because of a desire to survive the pestilence, and the stories are told because the young aristocrats need a useful pastime to entertain themselves while away from everyday life. Ultimately, from a structural point of view, the *cornice* of the *Decameron* remains a complete tale in and of itself, as it has a definite beginning, a body and an ending, and it is highly significant in its content and rhetorical construction. On the contrary the *cornice* of *Lo cunto* is not a simple introduction separated by the rest of the narration, nor does it have the same function that the *Introduzione* does in Boccaccio. Picone writes:

> Questa pagina, con la quale la raccolta basiliana si apre, non corrisponde all' Introduzione alla prima giornata del *Decameron*, (contenente la famosa descrizione della peste fiorentina del 1348, occasione storica da cui si era originato il libro di novelle), e non corrisponde nemmeno al *Proemio* (dove Boccaccio si rivolge al suo pubblico privilegiato di lettrici innamorate e malinconiche); mentre questi sono infatti dei testi non-narrativi, appartengono al mondo commentato, la '*Ntroduzzione* al *Pentamerone* è un testo narrativo: non solo appartiene al mondo narrato, ma genera la narrazione stessa.
>
> [This page, with which Basile's collection opens, does not correspond to the *Introduzione* on the first day of the *Decameron*, (in which there is the famous description of the pestilence that affected Florence in 1348, which became then the pretext from which the book originated), and it does not even correspond to the *Proemio* (where Boccaccio addresses his privileged audience composed of enamored and melancholic female readers). Indeed, while these are in fact more commentators than narrative texts, the "'Ntroduzzione" to the *Pentamerone* is a narrative text: it not only belongs to the narrated world but it generates the narration itself.][23]

Furthermore, in the *Pentamerone* the *cornice* is not a complete tale: it has a beginning, it has a body but it definitely does not have and end, as the body of the narrative extends itself to all the other tales. The conclusion of the introductory narrative in Basile coincides with the end of the book and the end of storytelling. This atypical *cornice* reveals eloquently the Baroque substrate of Basile's work, as it clearly represents the idea of the *mis en abime,* that is the idea of "art within art" very much pursued during that period. The *cornice* indeed represents the tale that generates and contains all the other tales, so *Lo cunto* is a collection of "tales within a tale." Furthermore, the introduction functions as a mirror to the other *cunti,* and this characteristic makes *Lo cunto* a specular narrative, a "story within a story" which further clarifies the meaning of the title *Lo cunto de li cunti* (The tale of the tales). Essentially, the *cornice* in the *Pentamerone* is the eggshell that contains the yolk. Picone writes:

> Il testo liminare del *Pentamerone*, insomma non serve a contestualizzare l'opera rispetto al suo pubblico o alla realtà referenziale, come i luoghi omologhi del *Decameron*: esso articola bensì il *cunto* primario dentro il quale sono inseriti i 49 *cunti* secondari; è la novella fondamentale che giustifica tutte le altre novelle che vengono affabulate al suo interno. A questa funzione vuole precisamente alludere anche il titolo. Titolo che di conseguenza implica una presa di posizione teorica e una scelta di campo narratologica, grazie alla quale Basile può differenziarsi rispetto a Boccaccio.
>
> [In other words, the introductory text of the *Pentamerone* does not provide a contextualization for the collection with respect to its audience or its referential environment, as happens in the frame-tale of the *Decameron*: it articulates the main *cunto* that contains the 49 secondary *cunti;* it is the basic tale that justifies all the other tales articulated within it. The title refers clearly to this function. Consequently, the title takes upon it a theoretical stand and a stylistic choice, thanks to which Basile is able to distance himself from Boccaccio.][24]

Another element that is often seen as a point of agreement, but which actually represents a point of variation and separation between the *Decameron* and *Lo cunto*, is the presence of what Boccaccio calls "*la brigata*" and Basile calls "*la marmaglia*" (the rabble). In point of fact, in both collections we find ten narrators who every day – for ten days in the *Decameron* and five in *Lo cunto* – take turns in the telling of stories; nevertheless, the similarities between the *brigata* and the *marmaglia* begin and end with the number. Indeed, while Boccaccio's *brigata* willingly comes together in the church of Santa Croce and decides to leave the city to escape the death and suffering caused by the plague, *la marmaglia* in *Lo cunto* is summoned to come to court, to satisfy one of the many whims of the slave-princess, and are chosen by Prince Tadeo. In the *Decameron*, furthermore, a king or a queen is chosen everyday and he/she has the responsibility of choosing the topic for the tales of that particular day and the order in which the tellers will speak. Most significant is the difference between the presence of the slave-princess in *Lo cunto* opposed by the presence of a king and a queen – "real" royalty – in the *Decameron.* In *Lo cunto* there is only one king, Tadeo, who decides the order in which the tellers will speak but has no say on the topic. Moreover, the *brigata* of the *Decameron* is made of ten young aristocrats, or more precisely, is composed of "seven young ladies … all … intelligent, gently bred, fair to look upon, graceful in bearing, and charmingly unaffected"[25]and "three young men… each of them … most agreeable and gentle bred"[26]. In contrast, in the *Pentamerone* the group of tellers is composed of ten old

hags, poor and uncouth in their manners, whose only ability is to know how to narrate better than anybody in their town:

> Ma non parenno a Tadeo de tenere tanta marmaglia 'mpeduta pe no gusto particolare de la mogliere… ne sciegliette solamente dece, le meglio de la cetate, che le parzero chiù provecete a parlettare. (Rak, 22)

> But since Tadeo did not think it proper to detain such a mob to satisfy his wife's whim…he chose just ten women, the best of the city, the ones who appeared to be the most expert and quick tongued. (Canepa, 41)

It is difficult not to read in the *marmaglia* chosen by Basile the *topos* of the world upside down so dear to the Baroque. The Neapolitan author ironically turns upside down the noble *brigata* of the *Decameron* and transforms it into a more vulgar and unsophisticated bunch.

A plausible reason for the fact that Basile's tellers are only women is that in popular tradition, tales are always told by women who spend their time knitting, sowing, spinning or simply sitting around the fireplace, often with the children; after all entertaining stories have always made the time go fast!

Another difference in the two works is in the onomastic of the storytellers. Boccaccio chooses names of literary and mythological origin, such as Pampinea, which means the "*rigogliosa*", the luxuriant one; Fiammetta, little flame (clearly inspired by the woman loved by the author); Filomena, "*l'amata o amante del canto*", the loved one, or the lover of singing (because of its connection to the nightingale); Emilia, that is, "*la lusinghiera*", the flattering one; Lauretta: a literary reference this time, though allusion to the woman loved by Petrarch in the *Canzoniere*; Neifile, which means "*nuova innamorata o l'amante di amor nuovo*", new in love, and clearly alludes to the Sweet New Style; and finally Elisa, the name by which Dido[27] was referred to in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claribus* and in the *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia di Dante,* where the unfortunate queen is identified as the prototype of the tragic love. These names were chosen by the author intentionally:

> E però, acciò che quello che ciascuna dicesse senza confusione si possa comprendere appresso, per nomi alle qualità di ciascuna convenienti o in tutto o in parte intendo di nominarle.[28]

> [And, therefore, so that we may perceive distinctly what each of them had to say, I propose to refer to them by names which are either wholly or partially appropriate to the qualities of each.][29]

Basile, on the contrary, uses names and nicknames that tend to highlight the low birth and both the physical and behavioral distortions of the women:

> Ma non parenno a Tadeo de tenere tanta marmaglia ... ne scegliette solamente dece, le meglio de la cetate, che le parzero cchiù provecete a parlettere, Zeza scioffata, Cecca storta, Meneca a vozzolosa, Tolla nasuta, Popa scartellata, Antonella vavosa, Ciulla mussuta, Paola sgargiata, Ciommetella zellosa e Iacova squacquarata. (Rak, 22)

> But since Tadeo did not think it proper to detain such a mob … he chose just ten women, the best of the city, the ones who appeared to be the most expert and quick-tongued. They were: lame Zeza, twisted Cecca, goitered Meneca, big-nosed Tolla, hunchback Popa, drooling Antonella, snout-faced Ciulla, cross-eyed Paola, mangy Ciommetella, and shitty Iacova. (Canepa, 42)

The names chosen by Basile are, as Canepa points out, all derived from the nobility:

> These are all derivatives of noble names common in Naples (Lucrezia, Francesca, Domenica, Vittoria, Porzia, Antonia, Giulia, Paola, Girolama, Giacoma), which Basile ironically distorts, just as the women themselves are "deformed" versions of the conventional group of noble tale-tellers found in the frames of many novella collections (e.g., Boccaccio's *Decameron*), as is evidenced by both their social class and their physical irregularities. (Canepa, 42)

Zeza, Tolla, Ciulla and Iacova could be considered the most interesting names out of the ten as they are also linked to popular traditions. Zeza is a name borrowed from the theater, and in the Neapolitan theater it is the name of Pulcinella's wife. Zeza showers her husband with excessive attention and caresses to make him comply with her requests – he can barely stand all of her attention. Her behavior originated the popular saying "*fa' 'a Zeza*" which is used to indicate a simpering or affected person. Tolla is also a name that finds its origin in the theater: in fact Tolla is Pulcinella's daughter, and she is also a symbol of forbidden love as her father opposes her marriage to Don Nicola, a student from Calabria. The name Ciulla is also interesting for the meaning it bears; indeed, in Neapolitan dialect "ciulla" means snail. It is possible that Basile chose this name to emphasize the contrast between the slowness with which the "old hag" probably moved and the fastness with which she could move her mouth; after all she is nicknamed the "*mussuta* (big lips)." Finally, Iacova, also Jacuvélla in Neapolitan, as already mentioned derives from Giacoma.

The name Giacomo/a in Neapolitan has always been used to indicate a simpleton, a person with simpering ways and with the habit of talking too much. Hence, it is possible that the adjective "*squacquarata*" (shitty) does not only refer to the intestinal incontinence of the old woman but also to her mouth's incontinence.[30]

Also significant is the difference in the way the male protagonists are named in the two collections. The three young men in Boccaccio carry names that allude to their nobility and to their character. We have Panfilo, "*tutto amore*" (all love); Filostrato, "*abbattuto d'amore*" (the defeated by love, and also the title of a poem in octaves written by Boccaccio); and Dioneo, "*il lussurioso*" (the lustful). In Basile the king is named Tadeo, which etymologically means stupid, and thus emphasizes the ineptitude of the king who never imposes orders, never chooses which teller would speak first or the topic of the stories:

> [Tadeo] is a good-natured but rather ineffectual simpleton (after all [he] is asleep during the central action of the frame tale, and once he wakes up he is generally portrayed in the guise of a henpecked husband).[31]

Tadeo is simply a puppet that Zoza manipulates at her will, and this represents another major difference between Boccaccio and Basile. In the *Decameron,* the three young men are needed by the women in part because of what Filomena says about women:

> We are fickle, quarrelsome, suspicious, cowardly, and easily frightened; hence I greatly fear that if we have none but ourselves to guide us, our little band will break up much more swiftly…
>
> Then Elisa said:
>
> It is certainly true that man is the head of the woman, and that without a man to guide us it rarely happens that any enterprise of ours is brought to a worthy conclusion.[32]

In *Lo cunto,* Zoza has the "head" of the man, she is not afraid to fight for what she wants and in the end her "enterprise…is brought to a worthy conclusion."

Basile turns the idyllic world of the Florentine master upside down and in doing so he makes a strong ideological statement, wanting to break with the tradition and start a new trend. Thus, *Lo cunto* could be read as an ideological manifesto of its author. Right at the beginning of the collection we find the following proverb:

> Fu proverbeio de chille stascionate, de la maglia antica, che che cerca chello che non deve trova chello che non vole e chiara cosa è che la scigna

> pe cauzare stivale restaie 'ncappata pe lo pede, come soccesse a na schiava pezzente, che non avenno portato maie scarpe a li piede voze portare corona 'n capo. (Rak, 10)
>
> A seasoned proverb of the ancient coinage says that those who look for what they should not find what they should not, and it's clear that when the monkey tried putting on boots it got its food stuck, just like what happened to a ragged slave girl who although she had never worn shoes on her feet wanted to wear a crown on her head. (Canepa, 35)

The choice to open the collection with a proverb does not only warn the readers that the author will rely heavily on popular tradition to find sources for his *cunti*[33], but, according to my own view, it also echoes what will happen to Lucia, who will be punished for her attempt to imitate the princess and play a role that she was not fit for.

Furthermore, the second part of the proverb[34] (in which Basile refers to a common tradition among hunters of taking off their boots and putting them back on in the presence of an ape, then filling the boots with glue and leaving them at disposal of the ape, which will then, in its attempt to passively imitate the hunters, put them on and remain stuck in the boots) could be read as a subtle but at the same time strong protest against "slavish" imitation of the tradition:

> With this information in mind, a very different reading emerges: what causes the ape's downfall is its slavish imitation of the human model; the proverb cautions against unquestionably "aping" a model, and thus dramatizes the necessity of *not* assuming popular tradition as an absolute authority. This short but significant example of the multiple, and often contrasting, layers that permeate *Lo cunto* is both a statement of artistic intent (Basile, in his relation to popular tradition that supplies him with the primary material for his work, will not merely imitate) and exhortation to read the text in an equally creative fashion.[35]

I believe, however, that the real innovation of *Lo cunto*, featured already in this opening proverb, is the presence of the Moorish slave as one of the main protagonists of the collection. Lucia[36] is an intricate figure as she stands in between the two worlds of reality and fairytale. From a historical point of view, she stands as the representative of the many slaves present in Naples during Basile's time; in the world of fairytales she replaces the atavistic enemy represented by the evil mother-in-law or stepmother.

Basile keeps his distance from tradition; however, it is also true that the structure of the single *cunti* resembles that of the Boccaccian *novella.* Basile mirrors Boccaccio in a parodic mode and reproduces the structure of the stories in the *Decameron*. In *Lo cunto de li cunti,* each *cunto* (except

the introduction) opens with the summary of the *cunto* that is about to be told, followed by a commentary by the women on the *cunto* that they have just heard, followed then by a proverb (a motto in Boccaccio) that introduces the new story that they are getting ready to hear. Then there is the actual *cunto,* which is concluded – except for the introductive and conclusive tales – with another proverb (again a motto in Boccaccio) which represents a sort of moral (or sometimes ironic) take on the story[37]. In Boccaccio we find approximately the same structure. Each tale is introduced by a summary of the story the *brigata* will hear, followed (except for the first tale) by a commentary on the previous tale, then a motto – an admonition to capture the attention of the listeners; finally, there is the actual tale, which is concluded always with another motto, a moral teaching.

The two works however are very different in some important aspects. While in Boccaccio there is always a direct address to the women[38], to whom the entire collection is dedicated, in Basile there is not. Also, Boccaccio becomes himself a narrator when on the fourth day he has a *Defense*[39], creating thus a tale within a tale; Basile, on the contrary, never interferes with the narrators and speaks always through them. The two collections differ also in the conclusion. In Basile the last tale, the one told by Zoza, concludes not only the activity of storytelling but also the book, whereas in Boccaccio the last tale is then followed by the "Conclusione" of the author. Another difference between the two works is that Basile's tales are intertwined with myriad metaphors that generate other stories within the main tales. As Rak says, the metaphors in *Lo cunto*, especially those pertaining to the alternation between the sun and the moon, form "*micro-racconti*" (micro-tales) populated with their own characters and stories, which are completely independent from the main narrative. In the *Decameron* the tales are more linear and there are fewer metaphors.

Boccaccio was definitely a role model for Basile: in fact, stylistically Basile wanted to excel in the narrative forum in dialect as Boccaccio did in Italian Tuscan; nonetheless, to consider the Decameron as the only source for Basile's work would be a mistake. [40] More importantly, though, we cannot ignore the debt that Basile owes to the other Italian narrators mentioned in the previous chapter, and most of all we can not overlook the influence of Giovanni Sercambi the author of *Il Novelliere* (c. 1399-1400), and Giovan Francesco Straparola, the author of *Le piacevoli notti* (1550-53).

The influence of Sercambi on Basile has been generally ignored or just mentioned *en passant* but it has never been really studied. Nonetheless, in reading *Il Novelliere* (a collection of 155 tales) we find at least seven tales

that have elements typical of the fairytale, and four of them are particularly interesting because they have a strong resemblance with some of Basile's *cunti.* The tales that carry the features of fairytale are II, V, XV, XXVIIII, CXXII, CXL, and CXLII[41]: in all of these tales we find the triplication of the action (the obstacles that the main protagonist has to overcome). Moreover, in XXVIIII we find the motif of the discovery of the princess' birthmarks (AARNE 850), in CXXII we have the presence of a dragon, and in CXLII there are magical animals that with their magical gifts help the hero to succeed in his enterprise.

On the other hand, Sercambi differs from the traditional fairytale in the characterization of the "hero". Indeed, as Sinicropi points out there are some differences between the classical fairytale hero and the hero in Sercambi. The hero in the fairytale often succeeds only thanks to the help provided by his magical "assistants" (magical animals, good fairies, dragons, magical stones, and so on); whether he behaves properly or not, or whether he is courageous or not, does not affect the happy ending of his adventure. In Sercambi, the hero is instead more in charge of his own destiny, and to succeed he needs not only magical help but, most importantly, his ingenuity and determination. This image of the simple, poor boy who succeeds mostly thanks to his cleverness and strong will was previously unknown, but after Sercambi's book it gathered a great legacy, and indeed most likely it inspired Straparola for his "raising tale" (a tale where the hero, an underprivileged boy from the populace, is able to change his social status thanks to his talent and ingenuity)[42].

Those of Sercambi's tales[43] that are strongly echoed in some of Basile's *cunti* are: XV "De bono Facto", XXVIIII "De astutia in juvene", CXXII "De Apetito canino et non temperato", CXL "De bona et justa fortuna". "De bono facto" is a tale in two parts, the second part of which might possibly have been a source for Basile's *cunto* "Lo 'ngnorante" (The ignoramus, 3.8), for it bears many similarities to Sercambi's tale. In the first part, "De bono facto" tells the story of Pincaruolo, a young boy from a country town near Milan who is sent by his mother to do some business in Milan and through many vicissitudes ends up being rich. The change of fortune for the protagonist is manifested also through a change of name: Pincaruolo becomes Torre[44] in the second part of the tale. After all, the name Pincaruolo suited a farmer but not the rich and powerful man the protagonist becomes:

> Pincaruolo, montato a cavallo co' fiorini 800, dice fra se medesmo :<<Io posso esser un gran signore; e poi che io sono a cavallo et ho tanti denari, da qui innanti mi potrò far chiamare Torre e non Pincaruolo.>>

> [Pincaruolo, riding his horse and with 800 florins, says to himself: "I could be a great gentleman; and as I have a horse and I have a lot of money since now on I could call myself Torre and not Pincaruolo."][45]

Torre continues his journey heading towards France, and on this journey he meets four men with exceptional powers, whom he takes with him. They are Rondello, who runs faster than a roe; Sentimento, who has a supernatural sense of hearing; Diritto, who has an extraordinary aim and can shoot a bird with a arrow while it is flying; and finally Macino, who is able to create wind with his breath[46]. With his four companions he reaches Paris, where he learns that the king has posted a proclamation in which he has promised his daughter in marriage to whoever can beat her in a race, but promising death to the loser. Torre enters the competition and, thanks to the help of his gifted companions, and in spite of the princess' tricks, wins the race and marries her.

The structure and content of Basile's *cunto* "Lo 'ngnorante" (The Ignoramus, 3.8) is almost the mirror image of Sercambi's tale. Moscicone is sent by his father to do some business in Cairo, and during his journey he meets men with extraordinary powers and takes them along with him. He meets: Furgolo (Flash),who runs faster than lighting; Aurecchia-a-leparo (Hare's-Ear), who "…can hear what's going on all over the world without moving a hair"; Cecaderitto (Sharpshooter), who like Diritto has an extraordinary aim; Shioshiariello (Blowboy), who can "blow down houses" (and for his ability to "blow" wind echoes Macino in Secambi's tale); and finally he meets Forte Schena (Strong Back), who can carry a mountain on his back[47]. With his five friends he reaches the kingdom of Bello Shiore (Beautiful Flower), where there is a king who has a daughter who can run faster than any other human being. The king has issued a proclamation promising his daughter in marriage to anyone who can to defeat her in a race; however, if the challenger should lose he will be killed. Obviously, Moscicone enters the race and, with the help of his five friends, notwithstanding the princess' tricks, he wins the race. Here the two stories diverge: while in Sercambi the king keeps his word and gives his daughter in marriage to Torre, in Basile's *cunto* the king, who in the end listens to his advisors rather than obey the "code of honor" (according to which once a man gives his word he must keep it), does not fulfill his promise:

> Lo re, vedenno la vettoria de na paposcia, la parma de no vozzacchio, lo triunfo de no caccialo-pascere, fece gran penziere si dovevale dare o no la filgia, e fatto conziglio co li sapute de corte soia, le fu respuosto che Ciannettela non era voccone pe li diente de no scauzacane e de n'auciello

> pierde-iornata e che senza macchia de mancatore poteva commutare la promessa de la figlia a no donativo de scure, che sarria stato chiù sfazione de sto brutto pezzentone che tutte le femmene de lo munno. (Rak, 592)
>
> Upon seeing that the victory had gone to a boody head, the palm to a featherbrain, the triumph to a big sheep, the king thought long and hard about giving his daughter to Moscicone. He called the wise men of his court to council, and they told him that Ciannetella was not a morsel for the teeth of a scoundrel and a good-for-nothing birdbrain, and that without the stain of going against his word he could commute the promise of his daughter into a monetary gift, which would satisfy this big ugly ragamuffin more than all the women in the world. (Canepa, 271)

The king followed his courtiers' advice and asked Moscicone how much money he wanted in exchange for the princess' hand. Moscicone who knew how much weight Forte Schena could carry on his back told the king that he wanted as "much gold and silver" as Forte Schena could carry. The king agreed and Moscicone ended up taking home a fortune and he shared it with his father and his companions. Hence, even without marrying the princess, as Torre does, he still becomes rich and lives happily ever after.

Upon comparison, the two tales' resemblance is evident: the men met by Torre have the same powers as the men encountered by Moscicone: the only difference in this part of the tale is that while Torre meets four men, Moscicone meets five men. I believe that, in a way, Forte Schena in the end replaces the princess in the role of 'giver of fortune". Torre gets his fortune by marrying the princess, while Moscicone, who is not considered a suitable husband for such royalty, earns his fortune thanks to the extraordinary strength of his companion. Other noticeable differences between the two tales are that Pincaruolo/Torre is sent on a journey by his mother, while Moscicone is sent by his father; also while Moscicone returns home and shares his good fortune with the father, Torre never returns to his mother, or if he does Sercambi does not tell us. The first divergence could be read again as a reversal operated by Basile, probably to distance himself from the source; the second difference instead is justified by the fact that while Basile is following strictly the protocol of the fairytale where the hero, after his adventurous journey, always goes back home, Sercambi is not.

The second of Sercambi's tales referred to by Basile, "De astutia in juvene", is suggestive on different levels. First of all, it presents the typical fairytale motif of the princess who does not laugh but then burst into laughter at the sight of a comic spectacle (AARNE 559), present also in Basile not only in the frame tale but also in the tale of "Peruonto" (1.3) and in "Lo Scarafone, Lo Sorece e Lo Grillo" (The Cockroach, the Mouse,