

# Gramarye

The Chichester Centre for Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Speculative Fiction

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## With work by

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- Giulia Depoli
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- Kristin Camitta Zimet
- Daniel A. Rabuzzi
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- Sylvie Jane Lewis
- Denisha Naidoo
- Ella Leith
- Marek Kohn
- Claire Rakich
- Lawrence Wilson
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With an introduction by  
Paul Quinn and Naomi Foyle



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# Editors' Introduction

Paul Quinn and Naomi Foyle

Last summer, the Chichester Centre for Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Speculative Fiction held a conference on Giambattista Basile. Organised by Centre Consultant Director Lorenza Gianfrancesco, 'Giambattista Basile: The Other Fairy Godfather' was a great event which saw a group of international academics address the work and legacy of this key author. This current volume of *Gramarye* is a product of that event, a Basile special edition of the journal.

We open with Yseult de Blécourt's fascinating discussion of the reception of Basile in the Low Countries; through a detailed, convention-challenging analysis of 'The Twin Brothers', de Blécourt makes a convincing case for Basile's Dutch readership. Davood Khazaie considers female resistance in a number of Basile's tales, with the potential for a female space discernible, if only obliquely, at various points in Basile's work. Assunta Vitale analyses the structure of the *Pentamerone* and the replication of that structure in Basile's text. In a sophisticated reading of *Pentamerone*, Vitale argues for the conscious artifice of Basile's construction, a collection of stories produced during a period in which collecting was in vogue. Giulia Depoli discusses Neapolitan magic tales, which sees Basile contextualised alongside Masuccio Salernitano and Girolamo Morlini. The result is an erudite repositioning of Basile and his fairy tales within an important, related genre. Ruth Bottigheimer's penetrating analysis of Basile's engagement with Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' reveals a deliberate and signalled use of Ovid's poem in Basile's 'The Myrtle'. Echo, inversion, knowing reference, are all deployed by Basile to indicate to his reader how he interacts with the classical author.

All of the papers from the Basile conference can be viewed at the Centre's YouTube channel (<https://youtube.com/@sussexcentreforfolklore4691>). Viewers will find 15 years' worth of videos on the YouTube channel, with recordings of conferences and one-off papers, including contributions from Jacqueline Simpson, Jeremy Harte, Steven O'Brien, Farah Mendlesohn, Ruth Bottigheimer, and the much-missed Bill Gray. Anne E. Duggan's recent excellent talk on overlooked women fairy-tale writers is there, as are some videos featuring a number of the University of Chichester's current undergraduates. Where possible, all Centre events will be available on the YouTube channel.

The review section of *Gramarye* 25 presents the usual broad range of new publications. Kirill Melnikov reviews Angela Carter's *Pyrotechnics: A Union of Contraries*.

This collection of essays edited by Charlotte Croft and Marie Mulvey-Roberts addresses the material and the visual in Carter's work, with essays grouped around four key themes: signs and objects, magical and performative elements, visual devices, and materiality in Carter's descriptions of the culinary and the corporeal. B.C. Kennedy reviews Jack Zipes' translation of the radical political tales of Hermynia Zur Mühlen. *The Castle of Truth and Other Revolutionary Tales* finds the Austrian aristocrat turned left-wing radical using the wonder tale to radicalise children and adults. This collection should sit alongside Zipes' earlier collection *Fairy Tales and Fables from Weimar Days* and Michael Rosen's *Workers' Tales* as important reminders of the openly political potential, and use in the 19th and early 20th centuries, of the fairy tale. B.C. Kennedy also reviews Mark Norman's *The Folklore of Devon*. Intended to succeed Ralph Whitlock's seminal *The Folklore of Devon* (1977), Norman's work is a wide-ranging account of Devon's rich folkloric history. Norman concludes with a challenge to the usual argument that folklore is only wedded to the past; for Norman, the internet provides the opportunity to continue the great tradition of preserving folklore undertaken by the Folklore Societies of the 19th century. Katherine Langrish reviews Jem Bloomfield's delightful *Paths in the Snow: A Literary Journey through The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. While considering how Lewis's text functions as literature, Bloomfield also examines the theology of his novel, resulting in a detailed discussion of Lewis's eclectic mix of sources and inspirations, while challenging some widely held assumptions and readings of the Narnia novels. Sophia Antoni-Burridge reviews Jack Zipes' timely reissue of Dorothy Burroughs' *Teddy the Little Refugee Mouse*. A paean to peace and kindness, originally written during the Second World War, this is another publication in Zipes' series of rediscovered children's books, which, for Zipes, 'call for peace and joy' and seek to help us avoid the mistakes of the past.

As the academic year enters its final phase, we are planning for next year's events. The Centre will be holding a symposium featuring our own research, so look out for flying beasts and Sussex giants. We will be marking several significant anniversaries: the bicentennial of the birth of George MacDonald, and the 35th and 60th anniversaries of *Twin Peaks* and Frank Herbert's *Dune*, two texts that can be described, rightly, as fairy tales, or fairy tale-like. We will also celebrate Tom Baker's contribution to fantasy and fairy tales as we reach the 50th anniversary of his first appearance as Doctor Who. For details of all forthcoming events please join the Centre's mailing list, and/or follow our Twitter ('X') feed, Facebook page, or website.

**Paul Quinn**

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‘Without Contraries is no progression’, advised William Blake, whose prophetic writings continue to inspire new generations.<sup>1</sup> And yet, as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine intensifies, and Israel, backed by Western governments, continues to use the war crimes of October 7th to justify what genocide scholar Raz Segal calls ‘a textbook case of genocide unfolding before our eyes’<sup>2</sup> with no end in sight, it is hard to see the world travelling anywhere but backward. A deeper, oppositional thinking is needed: anti-militaristic, anti-capitalist and decolonial. Challenging the ‘win-at-all-costs’ mentality of the warmongers, true vision comes from the grassroots, with increasing demands from environmentalists that humanity rethink our ideas of ‘progress’. Rather than ‘breaking new ground’ – itself a phrase with colonial echoes – real progress at this critical time for humanity must involve a gathering up of what has been shattered and abandoned: progress as the work of integration rather than innovation. Resolving the ordeals of the 21st century calls for new narratives as old as human history: stories of inclusion, justice, and forgiveness.

It is tragic that it might take war and climate crisis to encourage some people to more deeply value coexistence and ancient wisdom, but those who do are always rewarded with a sense of profound interconnection with each other and the planet. As Marek Kohn and Vladyslava Bondar (the latter pictured on this issue’s colourful cover) explore in their reflections on Kupala celebrations in Sussex, Russia’s attack on Ukraine has powerfully revived interest in Ukrainian midsummer traditions that were in danger of being diluted by the phenomenon of the contemporary music festival. As their article and beautiful photo gallery demonstrate, Kupala Brighton now brings a sense of strength and identity to Ukrainians in exile and the more established diaspora, and helps root them all in the local community and natural landscapes.

Contemporary reworkings of ancient narratives are well-familiar; of course, to readers of *Gramarye*. The poems and stories in this issue contribute in a vibrant multitude of ways to this vital project of ‘re-membling’ our shared past through fairy tales, fantasy and speculative fiction. In its grieving journey through ‘charity shops and antique markets’, ‘Daedalus Waiting’ by Fija Callaghan pays time-travelling homage to the human desire to put back together what has been torn asunder. Elsewhere, women’s voices rise up to defy their historical effacement. Though the prism of metamorphosis, Callaghan’s tender ‘Womanskin’ reflects on the ways sex-trafficked women survive. In ‘Lady Godiva’, Coventry’s famous naked rider, rivetingly portrayed by Susan Francino, insists on justice for the people and claims her place among the British saints. Reminding readers of history’s female poets, in ‘The Hooded Crow Revived, as Told By the Magpie’ by Daniel A. Rabuzzi, birds considered the village ‘scolds’ work their clever magic as shamanic skalds.

Putting ‘new wine in old bottles’, as Angela Carter famously observed, may cause ‘the old bottles to explode’;<sup>3</sup> yet – as Carter celebrated – such metaphorical detonations can be liberating: not bomb blasts but empathic epiphanies. In their different ways and forms, Kristen Camitta Zimet’s lyrical ‘Hansel and Gretel Retold’ and Lawrence Wilson’s artful ‘The Stepmother’s Tale’ both quietly shatter cruel stereotypes and create breathing room for fairy-tale meditations on grief and love. In ‘Red and Wolfe’, Denisha Naidoo takes a fizzy

approach, tartly satirizing human greed in a taboo-busting crime story that twists and turns like an Orwellian corkscrew. Curious children, of course, are the best new wine, and key to the pleasure of Ella Leith's highly quaffable 'A Folktale Telling' is the threat that its sceptical young narrator will knock the whole story over. Form, as well as voice and character, can crack under contemporary pressures: in 'My Grandmother's House' Sylvie Jane Lewis brings an experimental poetics to bear on intergenerational trauma, deploying a typographical caesura that hints of fractured histories and fragile walls.

Throughout this issue of *Gramarye*, themes of regeneration speak to the possibility of significant change within the universal cycles of life and death. 'The Green Egg' by Claire Rakich is a subtle exploration, not just of shame turned inside out, but also the impact one courageous act can have on a community. Globally, such courage is needed now more than ever. Ukrainians show immense bravery, not only in defending their land, but also in charting a path of national sovereignty between two antagonistic imperialist powers. Facing criticism from both sides, Israel-Palestinian peacebuilding groups including The Parents Circle, Combatants for Peace and Standing Together demonstrate great fortitude in continuing to say 'Enough Blood and Tears'. As Dr Susanne Sklar explored in her recent uplifting study day 'Blake's Vision of Peace' in Felpham, such initiatives build on Bishop Desmond Tutu's efforts to reorient our earthly struggles to the goals of truth and reconciliation, and embody William Blake's belief in what she calls 'ferocious forgiveness'.<sup>4</sup> As we try to address the mountainous harms we cause others and the planet, it is instructive to consider that forgiveness, for Blake, as described in the final plates of his epic poem *Jerusalem: Emanations of the Giant Albion*, was a rapturous state of grace between God, humanity and the beyond-human world, achieved only after we have made cataclysmic progress in our self-understanding:

... the Bow is a Male & Female & the Quiver of the Arrows of Love  
Are the Children of this Bow, a Bow of Mercy and Loving-kindness laying  
Open the hidden Heart in Wars of mutual Benevolence, Wars of Love<sup>5</sup>

## Naomi Foyle

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### Notes

1. William Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', *Poems and Prophecies*, ed. Max Plowman (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1976), 43.
2. Raz Segal, 'A Textbook Case of Genocide' in *Jewish Currents*, 13 October 2023, <https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide> (accessed 12 June 2024).
3. Angela Carter, 'Notes from the Front Line', *On Gender and Writing*, ed. Micheline Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983).
4. Susanne Sklar, *William Blake's Vision of Peace*, talk at Felpham Village Hall, West Sussex, 27 April 2024, <https://quietgarden.org/event/william-blakes-vision-of-peace-empathy-inclusivity-ferocious-forgiveness-and-fair-trade/>
5. William Blake, 'Jerusalem: Emanations of the Giant Albion' (Plate 97), *Poems and Prophecies*, 282.



Fig. 1 Anton Pieck's illustration in *De sprookjes van Grimm* (*Grimms' Fairy Tales*), trans. M.M. de Vries-Vogel (Utrecht: De Haan, 1942).

# The Twin Brothers: On the reception of Basile in the Low Countries

Yseult de Blécourt

**I**n the early 1980s, I left dragons behind to concentrate on witches and werewolves. However, my interest in dragons was only temporarily drowned. But while it never completely disappeared, its recent resurfacing meant a much more stringent approach. In the 1980s my dragons consisted of essays, stories, and drawings. Now they are academical, and in that context the stories and drawings have disappeared. When I was thinking about Basile and needed a sharp focus, my mind almost automatically veered towards dragons by way of case study. They proved more than apt.

I am an historical anthropologist and it does not make any sense to try and reconstruct historical processes from people's memories as they can be extremely distorted and in the best case only go back one or two generations. There is a clear ultimate limit to a collective memory, including when the memory itself has been transmitted in narrative form. However, here I am not much concerned with elaborating on these kinds of theoretical issues of collective (or individual) memories and my remarks are merely to show that I am aware of them.

A practical issue I need to mention at the start of this paper is language. I am working with Dutch and also Frisian source material, discussing it in English. Basile, of course, wrote in Italian, or to be more precise in Neapolitan. To make it more complicated, his stories reached the Netherlands through German sources, especially the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* of the Brothers Grimm. These were partly based on French publications, and some of the female informants of the Grimms could read Italian. Something could easily get lost in translation.

In this contribution I have chosen two Basile dragon stories. The first, 'Lo mercante', with a seven-headed dragon, I will summarise in detail in order to be able to follow its derivations in later publications

There are only a few texts in the Dutch and Flemish fairy-tale collections that betray their relation to 'Lo Mercante' (Tale 7 of the First Day). I will establish why in some cases this can be asserted and why in others it can't. In other words: which dragons have a Basile tint and which less so. The difficulty of identifying a Basile text is partly due to the Dutch (or Flemish)

folklore research that only occasionally enquired into fairy tales (the bulk of the material is concentrated on legends), and partly to the criteria employed. One of the main issues that I will discuss is whether the 'The Twin Brothers' can be directly traced back to a Basile text (in German, English or French), or whether an intermediate source has to be assumed by way of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* by Wilhelm Grimm, especially the tale of 'The Two Brothers' (no. 60). Investigation into the possibility of the latter is hampered by German fairy-tale researchers who have only reluctantly acknowledged a potential influence by the Basile text on the *KHM*, notwithstanding the Grimms' great enthusiasm for the Italian collection.

I have chosen an in-depth analysis of two tales. Whether this tale can be called a 'type' is another question. Whether my examples are typical or not can only be answered once other Basile tales have been similarly analysed. My observations and conclusions will, however, have some validity in the case of these two tales.

### **The dragons in the Pentamerone**

In Basile's work dragons appear in several places. 'Lo Mercante' is the story of twin brothers, the eldest of whom, Cienzo, goes on a journey and encounters a seven-headed dragon. However, an artist would have difficulty drawing the beast, as the (translated) descriptions somewhat differ. In the 1985 Dutch translation it is: 'het verschrikkelijkste monster dat men ooit ter wereld gezien had, met hanekammen, katekoppen en vlammeende ogen, de klauwen van een beer, de staart van een slang',<sup>1</sup> that is to say 'cockscombs, catheads and fiery eyes, the claws of a bear, and the tail of a snake'. In the Zipes translation, the monster slightly changed shape: 'It was the most terrible monster that had ever been seen in the world. It had the crest of a cock, the heart of a cat, eyes of fire, mouth of racehorses, wings of a bat, claws of a bear, and a tail of a serpent.'<sup>2</sup> In the 1893 Burton translation: 'the most terrible that could be seen in the world. On each head he had a cock's comb and a cat's face, eyes of fire, a dog's mouth, a bat's jaws, and he had a bear's paws and a serpent's tail.'<sup>3</sup> In German: 'und einen schrecklicheren habe man noch nirgends in der Welt gesehen, der hätte nämlich einen Kamm wie ein Hahn, der Kopf einer Katze, feurige Augen, Mäuler wie der Kampfhunde, Flü-Kopf einer Katze, feurige Augen, Mäuler wie der Kampfhunde, Flügel wie eine Fledermaus, Bärenklauen und einen Schlangenschwanz'.<sup>4</sup> For the sake of completeness, the original: 'ch'a chella terra nc'era apparzeto no dragone co sette teste, lo chiù terribile, che se fosse maje visto a lo munno. Lo quale aveva le creste de gallo, la capo de gatto, l'uocchie de fuoco, le bocche de cane corzo, l'ascelle de sporteglione, le granfe d'urzo, la coda de serpe'.<sup>5</sup>

Every day this dragon would eat a Christian, and precisely on the day Cienzo passed by, it was the turn of the little daughter of the king, Menechella. Cienzo noticed the princess approaching, jumped towards the dragon and with one stroke of his sabre decapitated one of the dragon's heads. But the dragon rubbed a bit of grass that grew nearby on his neck,

and put the head back on. Thereupon Cienzo tried again and in one stroke cut off the seven heads, which jumped from the necks 'as peas from a ladle'.<sup>6</sup> Basile used language very imaginatively. The story of Cienzo continued with him tearing out the dragon's seven tongues and picking the grass (or the herb) the dragon had used to reattach his head. He then sent Menechella back to her father and took a little rest in an inn to take a leak.

The king was so pleased to see his daughter back that he made it known that whoever had killed the dragon should come and take the girl as his wife. When a malicious peasant heard that, he collected the dragon's heads, went to the king and announced himself as the killer. He was immediately made king (or at least the crown was put on his head) and when Cienzo, who was still in the inn, heard that, he told himself how stupid he had been: 'I had Fortune by the hair; and I let it slip from my grasp; I would have been given half of a treasure and I refused, holding it of such account as a German holds water'.<sup>7</sup> The Dutch translation is here even more precise and has 'as a Bavarian cares for fresh water'.<sup>8</sup> Cienzo then composed a letter to the princess, asking her to swear to her father that he had killed the dragon instead of the peasant, as she had been a witness of the event. He was then brought to the palace, where the king asked him how he dared to pretend that he had killed the dragon. (Basile keeps on calling Menechella's father 'king' while at the same time admitting that the peasant wears the crown.) The tongues are missing, replied Cienzo. Now the king immediately took the crown from the peasant and wanted to send him to the galleys too, but Cienzo asked for him to be pardoned. Cienzo then married the princess.

The next morning Cienzo saw a young girl in a house opposite the palace. Menechella reacted angrily, but her husband went to the girl nevertheless. She was an evil fairy and bound Cienzo in her enchanted tresses (the translations use the metaphor of the tethered colt). Now Cienzo's twin brother Meo, anxious for news of his brother, decided to go and look for him. He met the same people his brother did and was received by Menechella as her husband. Meo did the honourable thing; he divided the blankets and said he was too tired to make love. The next morning he saw the same fairy Cienzo had seen, managed to overcome her, found his brother and rescued him. But when Meo told Cienzo that he had slept in the same bed as the princess, Cienzo became very angry and before Meo could explain about the blankets, Cienzo cut off his head. The princess, who had rushed to the house of the fairy and saw what Cienzo had done and heard that it has been his brother, told her husband about the blankets. Luckily Cienzo remembered the dragon's herb and put Meo's head back on. And everyone lived happily ever after.

The ninth story of the first day, 'The Charmed Hind' ('La cerva fatata'), contains a reprise of the story of Cienzo and Meo. It seems that Basile wanted to correct certain details, but for the sake of variation, he didn't write about twins but made the two male protagonists into two friends, Canneloro and Fonzo, whose mothers had been made pregnant by the same method: boiling the heart of a sea-dragon and sniffing the fumes that came from it. That worked so well that even the furniture became pregnant. Through this method the

two friends looked exactly the same. Yet at one point they had to part from each other. Canneloro left a token for Fonzo which could tell him how he fared, and he had many adventures before he won Fenizia, the daughter of a king. Now Canneloro did not elope with a fairy as Cienzo had done, but went hunting and met a hind, a monster in disguise who consumed her victims. In the meantime Fonzo, in search of his friend, had spent the night with Fenizia but had put a sword in between them. He bested the hind and saved Canneloro, as well as her other victims.

The two stories are clearly the same and even throw light on each other. From a genealogical point of view, these dragons are related to both ancestors and progeny. According to Zipes, the Basile story is related to the almost a century older one by Giovanni Francesco Straparola about Cesarino the Dragon Slayer: Straparola's dragon had only one head (and consequently one tongue).<sup>9</sup> The Grimms traced the genealogy even further back to the story of Sigurd slaying Fafnir and to Thor's battle with the Midgardworm.

### Dragons in Dutch folklore

The story 'The Two Equal Brothers' (Dutch: 'De twee gelijke broers') was published by Waling Dykstra in 1896. It was the Dutch translation of a story in Frisian, published in 1854 in the journal *Iduna*.

The story was about a fisherman who caught a little jar (Dutch: *potje*, but read: 'bottle') in his net. He opened it and a thick red smoke came out. From it appeared a very big man (in the next sentence called a ghost) who implored the fisherman to put him back in the bottle, then he would prosper. The ghost also told him he would find a little box (*kistje*), which he needed to divide and give (read 'feed') parts to his wife, his horse and his dog. They then all got pregnant, his wife even with twins. When the brothers were older, they went on a journey and acquired for each of them a bear cub, a wolf pup, and a lion cub. Yet at one point they had to part from each other: One brother, in the rest of the story called 'the hunter', left a token for the other which could tell him how he fared, and he came to a city where a princess was about to be offered to a dragon with fourteen heads. With the help of his animals, he severed all the dragon's heads from its body. The princess wanted to marry immediately, but he found himself too young and preferred to have a leap year. He cut the tongues out of the dragon's heads and left. Now the coachman (rather than a peasant) blackmailed the princess into marrying him. She asked her father to delay it for a year. The hunter came just back in time for the marriage between the princess and the coachman and unmasked the imposter. Instead of being pardoned, he was put in a *spijkerton* (a barrel with nails hammered in so that they stuck out at the inside) and rolled down the hill.

Yet the hunter and the princess did live happily ever after. A few days later, the hunter looked out of his window and noticed a fire. He became curious, found a witch and was changed into stone, together with his animals. At that time his brother had noticed by the

token the hunter had left behind that something was wrong. He arrived at the palace, was taken for his brother, but did not need an excuse not to sleep with the princess. That passage was left out. He still looked out of the window, noticed the fire, forced the witch to disenchant his brother (she used the water of life), and tried to burn the witch. But they first had to drive the devil out of her. Then they returned to the city and the brother told the hunter how the princess had hugged him. Thereupon the hunter became jealous and cut his brother's head off. Luckily, he remembered that he had still some drops of the water of life and he put his brother back together and made him alive again. Again everyone lived happily ever after, but in the Frisian story the detail is added that when the hunter became king, he made his brother the commander of the army.<sup>10</sup>

This text can be divided in three parts. The first very much reads like an *Arabian Nights* story; the second resembles the Basile story of Canneloro, with brothers so like one another that one could not be known from the other when apart;<sup>11</sup> and the third is almost exactly the same as 'Lo Mercante': they so much resembled one another that one could hardly tell which was one and which the other.<sup>12</sup>

The joining of the two parts of the *Pentamerone* in the above Frisian story was taken from the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Fairy Tales*) by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The piece that Wilhelm had added was also derived from Basile. Jacob also changed the style. He rendered Basile's clever bombastic way of expression with something plainer.

## **A dragon in Frisian folklore**

Another example of a Basile dragon that arrived in Frisia by way of the Grimms was the story of 'The Five Sons'. The one-headed dragon (see Fig. 2) can even be problematised. In the Burton translation it is a 'ghul', that is to say a 'ghoul', which is a kind of ghost. Rudolf Schenda's German translation makes the antagonist into an 'orca' (ogre). Yet in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, the standard work for this kind of question, the beast is named a dragon. In the Frisian story, which I will discuss more extensively below, it is a 'fügel', a bird. The man who retold the story in Frisian situated it in the time of King Radbout, that is to say when the Frisians converted to Christianity. He could not do anything with a dragon. In the 1970s Ype Poortinga, a writer who after his pension started to collect folktales and successfully published them, one imposing book after another, also mentioned a bird, which means that his interlocutors derived their version via the Frisian story and not from the Grimms. Let me discuss 'The Five Sons', to have a tool to start the genealogy of this tale.

Pacione has five sons, whom he sends out to learn a trade. His oldest son, Luccio, became a master thief. The second one, Titillo, a boat builder. The third one, Renzone, a marksman. The fourth, Jacovo, was able to raise the dead. Menecuccio, the fifth and last one, understood the language of birds. He had just learned that an ogre had kidnapped the king's daughter, Cianna, who was promised to the one who rescued her. They found the ogre on a rock, with the princess resting her head in his lap. She came with them in the



Fig. 2 Another example of a Basile dragon that arrived in Frisia by way of the Grimms was the story of 'The Five Sons'.



Fig. 3 The Dutch artist and children's book author Tonke Dragt, in her first main book *Verhalen van de tweelingbroers* (*Stories of the Twin Brothers*, 1961).

boat and as soon as the ogre found her missing, he changed himself into a black cloud. Renzone took his bow and shot the ogre in the eye, who then fell straight into the sea. Meanwhile Cianna had been so frightened of the ogre that she dropped dead. But Jacovo brought her back to life. Now the king was at a loss as to whom he should give his daughter. After some consideration, he decided on the father, because he was the root of his daughter's salvation.<sup>13</sup>

Zipes points at both a Morlini and a Straparola narrative as predecessors of Basile, but actually this is Greek myth (I am sure Jacob Grimm will have made a reference to it somewhere). Basile referred to both Perseus and in particular to Jason, where Medea lulls the dragon guarding the golden fleece to sleep. It is thus questionable how willing Cianna was to leave her dragon. As Zipes has already indicated, a later link in the family tree is the Brothers Grimm, although there was also a late 17th-century German version:<sup>14</sup> in particular 'The Four Skilful Brothers' (no. 129); one of the brothers will have perished (Titillo). And in the *Arabian Nights*, the story of the fairy Perî Bânû has similar characteristics, although 'no Arabic original has ever been discovered'.<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Grimm obtained the story from the Haxthausen family. At one early point in the development in the *KHM*, the Grimms planned to dedicate an entire volume of their tales to Basile.<sup>16</sup>

The first Frisian version, 'De trije jonkers fen Birgum' ('The three squires from Bergum'), appeared in the *Friesche Volksalmanak* of 1888. Their father sent them out with the advice not to get involved with any girl 'hwent dat is gefaerlik güd' (because that is dangerous stuff).<sup>17</sup> One of the brothers went east, the other west, and the last one south. The oldest, Flink (brave), joined a tribe of thieves, of which he soon became the chief. The middle one, Tûk (clever), was adopted by a group of hunters, and the last one, Fornim (know-all), was taken in by a couple, of whom the man was a tinker. When after a year they returned home, their father set each a test. Then the daughter of King Radbout was taken by an eagle. The brothers found 'de earn mei syn grouwe kop op de prinsesse hjar boarst to sliepen' ('the eagle with its ugly head sleeping on the princess's breasts').<sup>18</sup> Their boat did not initially survive having a monster fall on it, and the princess chose the youngest brother. This all happened in Earnewâld, Eagle's Wood. The fairy tale had turned into an explanatory legend.

The 19th-century author T[jibbe] G[eerts] v[an] d[er] Meulen situated the story in Frisia, name-dropping the places of Birgum (Bergum), Starum (Stavoren), Suwâld (Suawoude), and Earnewald. He was the publisher of the local newspaper and earned some money as a public speaker. It seems he did his best to diverge from the *KHM* as much as possible (e.g. turning the poor family into gentry), although he could not help copying some particular sentences. Two other versions were notated in the early 1970s by Ype Poortinga. The two stories below stem from before the time that he met the narrator who wrecked his new career; as that man shamelessly divulged so-called Frisian stories he had just before found in the local library. This made every book look suspicious, but there was a clear development in Poortinga's work, and his first book, *De ring fan it ljocht* (*The ring of light*) of 1976, was still without mention of any narrators.

Three young men met in an inn, one a good climber; the other a shooter (*sjitter*), and a third who could paste and glue very quickly. They were all three interested in saving the princess, although more because of the money than for the sake of the lady. The climber found two women on top of a mountain: the princess and a witch. He knocked the latter unconscious, but she awoke and pursued the three men until the shooter killed her. She fell on top of their boat, which was smashed to smithereens but quickly glued back together. He got the princess, and the other two were happy with the money.<sup>19</sup>

Almost a century after Van der Meulen, one of Poortinga's sources still remembered the main details. That was much less the case with the last version notated by Poortinga, to be found in *De foet fan de reinbôge* (*At the foot of the rainbow*) (1979). A shooter, a carpenter and a man who could glue everything back together were travelling. They came to a big sea that they could not walk around, so they took a boat. The land at the other side was guarded by all sorts of strange beings. A kind of eagle flew over them, was shot and fell directly on the boat. The third man glued it back together before they all drowned.<sup>20</sup> The princess had completely disappeared.

The influence of Basile was probably much more widespread than simply the Netherlands. With the help of the in-depth analyses offered above, it is, for instance, immediately clear that the British story of 'The Three Sons', even if only as a summary, is related to the Frisian story by Van der Meulen analysed here and therefore to *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. It seems a bit far-fetched to argue that contacts between Britain and Frisia played a role in the almost literary transmission of the tale. As Katherine Briggs remarked, 'Many examples have been recorded in Ireland', which suggests a similar Grimms impact there. There are also other parts of Europe in which either the Grimms or Basile could have been read, or read aloud. Briggs also noticed a 'literary version' in the *Pentamerone*. This implies that at least Briggs knew the 17th-century collection.<sup>21</sup>

Approaching texts as components of a fairy-tale genealogy demands a particular focus, and here dragons were chosen. As I have argued, Basile had a particular relationship with dragons, even though he sometimes disguised them as other monsters. The questions still to be answered are, of course, how the tales without dragons were received and why were some tales more popular, and among whom, than others. Future students will need a good command of the existing literature to see what has already been answered and what not.

## Epilogue

The Dutch artist and author Tonke Dragt, in her first main book *Verhalen van de tweelingbroers* (*Stories of the Twin Brothers*, 1961, see Fig. 3), was inspired by a number of fairy tales. For instance, she quoted lines from the Grimms' 'The Two Brothers' in chapter two and the second half of chapter four. What is less known (not cited in the main overview of her work, *ABC Dragt of 2013*) is that she borrowed bits from Basile as well, the translation of whose book had become available in Dutch at the time she moved to The Hague from the Dutch Indies where she had spent her youth. She recently admitted that to me, but such is not really necessary as the evidence speaks for itself, even though there are no dragons in her first books (they only appeared in *De zevensprong* (translated as: *The Song of Seven*, 1966). The name of one of the twins, Giacomo, seems clearly derived from Jacovo (the 'v' is just a soft 'm'). Also other details of 'The Five Sons' emerge, as Giacomo learns how to shoot and becomes a master-thief. I leave it to those familiar with the Dragt universe to determine whether he also gained the princess, which would have been Mariana, the daughter of the chief judge of Bambina.

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## Yseult de Blécourt

## Notes

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3. Giambattista Basile, *Il Pentamerone*, trans. by Richard Francis Burton (1893, Digireads edition, 2020), 56.
4. Giambattista Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen: Das Pentamerone*, ed. Rudolf Schenda Beck, trans. Hanno Helbling (C.H. Beck, 2000), 74.
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6. Cf. the Dutch translation, Rein Valkhoff, *Italiaansche volkssprookjes* (Utrecht: De Haan, 1948), 38. This translation is practically literal.
7. Valkhoff, *Italiaansche volkssprookjes*, 39.
8. Basile, *Pentamerone de eerste dag*, trans. by Daniël de Schrijver, 82.
9. Zipes, *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 363.
10. Waling Dykstra, *Uit Friesland's volksleven van vroeger en later*, vol. II (Leeuwarden: Bruijs, 1896), 35-42.
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15. Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, I (Santa Barbara (CA): ABC-CLIO, 2004), p. 81. Cf. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, 'Hanna Dyāb's Witch and the Great Witch Shift' in Jonathan Barry, Owen Davies & Cornelia Osborne (eds), *Cultures of Witchcraft in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 53-77.
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18. *Friesche Volksalmanak* (1888), 18.
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20. Ype Poortinga, *De foet fan de reinbôge* (Baarn/Leeuwarden: Bosch & Keuning/De Tille, 1979), 33-4.
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# Women's Resistance and Rebellion in Giambattista Basile's Fairy Tales

Davood Khazaie

**G**iambattista Basile's fairy tales are noted for their depth, creativity, and regional flair. From the mysterious transformations in 'The She-Bear' to the enchanted quests in 'The Three Citrons', and the profound brotherly bond portrayed in 'The Enchanted Doe', Basile's narratives offer more than mere whimsical adventures: they provide a nuanced exploration of societal norms, power dynamics, and identity. Through the lens of feminist and post-colonial perspectives, these tales reveal layers of meaning and symbolism that resonate with contemporary discourse on gender, race, and colonialism. 'The She-Bear', 'The Three Citrons', and 'The Enchanted Doe' challenge and subvert prevailing social norms, offering distinctive perspectives on the intricacies of human existence. These tales delve into the intersections of gender, power, and identity, defying conventional notions while providing fresh insights into the complexities of human condition. An analysis of these texts reveals the enduring relevance of Basile's tales and their capacity to inspire critical dialogues about gender roles, racial equality, and societal empowerment.

'The She-Bear'<sup>1</sup> (ATU 510B)<sup>2</sup> navigates through an intricate maze of societal norms, patriarchal structures and preconceived notions about femininity and beauty. It is a compelling tale that embraces the theory of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw,<sup>3</sup> and a feminist critique of patriarchal norms that invites readers to question traditional perspectives on gender, beauty and identity. The tale commences with a distressed king fervently seeking a wife as beautiful as his deceased queen. The king's obsessive quest exemplifies Laura Mulvy's theory of the 'male gaze',<sup>4</sup> which describes how women are often subjected to the objectifying gaze of men, reducing them to passive objects of male desire. His propositions to his daughter Preziosa are an extreme manifestation of the patriarchal authority that views women as a means to fulfill male desires.

Preziosa's subsequent transformation into a she-bear is a potent metaphor for her escape from patriarchal norms and a critique of the societal expectation placed on women. The transformation challenges the rigid confines of femininity prescribed by her society and underscores the constructed nature of gender, implying that gender

norms can be negotiated, contested and redefined. It embodies Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity'<sup>5</sup> as she assumes an entirely different identity to navigate her life and claim her autonomy. Preziosa's transformation resonates with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Her experiences are influenced not only by her gender but also by her multiple intersecting identities – as a woman, a princess, and a she-bear. Each identity presents unique challenges and shapes Preziosa's experiences differently. This underscores the importance of considering multiple intersecting layers of identity when examining experiences of oppression or privilege. Moreover, her life in the forest and later in the royal court of the King of Acquacorrente adds an extra dimension to her intersectional identity.

As a she-bear, she experiences a life devoid of the luxurious comforts of her royal past, only to be reintroduced to it when a prince takes her in. Her transition across class boundaries emphasises the significance of intersectionality, suggesting that our identities and experiences are not just shaped by gender but also by other social categories, such as class and species. Furthermore, her acceptance and subsequent affectionate treatment by the prince, who is unaware of her true identity, disrupts traditional norms of beauty and attraction. His non-traditional attraction towards Preziosa as a she-bear defies conventional standards of beauty, a concept widely discussed in contemporary queer theory. Upon reverting to her human form, Preziosa reveals a resilient and virtuous character that captivates the prince. Her transformation challenges patriarchal norms of beauty and underlines the importance of recognising women's worth beyond physical attractiveness. This aligns with ideas of societal beauty standards as tools used to undermine women's empowerment.

'The She-Bear' provides a powerful narrative that weaves together a critique of patriarchal gender norms and a celebration of the intersectionality of identities. The tale reveals the constraints of societal norms and advocates for the appreciation of individual autonomy, resilience, and multi-dimensional identities. In doing so, it aligns with modern feminist discourse and intersectional theory, imploring readers to look beyond simplistic categorisations, embracing the complexity and diversity of individual experiences.

The prince's affection towards Preziosa, even when she assumes the form of a she-bear, challenges 'heteronormativity'<sup>6</sup> and the 'heterosexual matrix',<sup>7</sup> which limit our understanding of gender and sexuality. His ability to recognise and appreciate Preziosa's kindness, service and, eventually, her physical beauty, disrupts conventional norms and redefines the standards of attraction. Her ultimate acceptance and celebration in the court of the king assert her diverse identities, serving as a testament to the possibilities that emerge when the intersections of identity are acknowledged and respected.

'The She-Bear' also brings to life the complex intersections between class, gender, and species. Preziosa's capacity to navigate various class spaces from the forest to the royal court, while commanding respect and authority in both, illustrates

the fluidity of identity and the potential for individuals to defy their predetermined social roles. Her interactions with different species, whether as a human among animals in the forest or as a she-bear among humans in the court, further delve into the exploration of identity beyond the anthropocentric perspective, a concept frequently discussed in contemporary post-humanist theories (cf. Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Rosi Braidotti).<sup>8</sup>

Basile's narrative not only exposes the underlying patriarchal norms but also lays the groundwork for envisioning a world that recognises and honours diverse intersecting identities. By challenging prescribed standards of beauty and subverting traditional gender roles, this tale illuminates the path towards a society where identity is not confined to binary notions but is understood as fluid, complex, and intersecting.

In 'The She-Bear', the contrasting names of the two kingdoms, Roccaspra ('Dry Rock') and Acquacorrente ('Running Water'), suggest a shift from rigidity to fluidity, from stagnation to flow. 'Dry Rock' represents a place characterised by rigidity of thought and action, while 'Running Water' symbolises a realm of enlightenment and renewal, where ideas and emotions flow freely like water.

'The Three Citrons' (ATU 408)<sup>9</sup> offers a fertile ground for applying a postcolonial feminist lens, providing insights into the socio-political constructs of gender, race and power that underpin its narrative. The story's main protagonist, the Prince, serves as an emblem of patriarchal and colonial hegemony. His relentless quest for a bride who fits a narrowly defined ideal of beauty (white as cheese and red as blood, 'a wife who becomes the object of his appetite')<sup>10</sup> is indicative of what Naomi Wolf describes as the beauty myth.<sup>11</sup> This obsessive fixation reinforces a Eurocentric standard of beauty, thereby marginalising women who do not conform to this aesthetic. The prince's criteria and aspirations, characterised by colour and class-based biases, mirror the Eurocentric biases that define the civilised and the savage, as proposed by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism*.<sup>12</sup> This Eurocentric gaze not only contributes to an aesthetic hierarchy but also perpetuates a socio-economic one, manifested in the subjugation of women, especially those of colour. The tale depicts the 'other' as magical, exotic, and in need of salvation. The portrayal of the black slave woman, who tricks the fairy – freed by the Prince from the citron – into revealing herself, and subsequently frightens her away – transformed into a dove – by piercing her head with a pin, reflects this dual subjugation, operating under the yoke of race and gender. The black woman, ultimately vilified and punished for her ambition and transgression, embodies the experience of intersectionality. She is subjected to a narrative that reinforces racial and gender stereotypes, echoing Gayatri Spivak's concept of the silenced subaltern.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, the fairy emerging from the citron presents an exotic spectacle, fulfilling the prince's aesthetic fantasy. Her emergence from the foreign and enigmatic citron fruit, along with the prince's desire to treat her as a queen,<sup>14</sup> reflects a form of cultural

imperialism reminiscent of the notion of the 'Exotic Other', a trope prevalent in Western colonial literature. It reminds us of the painting 'The White Slave' (1888) by Jean-Jules-Antoine Lecomte du Nouÿ (Fig. 2). The narrative's treatment of the fairy as a coveted object to be possessed and ultimately domesticated underscores Butler's concept of performativity. This is exemplified by the fairy's transformation into a bird, signifying her limited agency within the prince's heterosexual matrix.

Despite the evident patriarchal and colonial undertones, 'The Three Citrons' can be perceived as softly subversive when scrutinised through a postcolonial feminist lens. The fairy's transformative emergence from the citron fruit symbolises the theme of rebirth and resistance common in post-colonial narratives, suggesting an underlying resilience in the face of oppressive forces. Moreover, the denouement of the tale, where the prince gains a more profound understanding of the unfolding events and punishes the deceitful slave, could hinder potential criticism of prevailing patriarchal norms. However, it is noteworthy that despite his perceived transformation, the prince's newly found empathy doesn't significantly disrupt the status quo, nor does it provide a truly liberating space for women. The tale perpetuates Eurocentric beauty standards, reinforcing gendered hierarchies and using racialised characters to augment these narratives. Nonetheless, it also offers subtle instances of subversion and avenues for resistance. Although these moments are not transformative in radically withdrawing the established power relations, they hint at potential disruptions to patriarchal and colonial hegemony.

The role of the black woman, for instance, while ultimately tragic, nevertheless showcases a form of resistance against her subjugated position by appropriating the prince's love interests and assuming her role. She employs subversion as a means of survival. This act of resistance, while it does not end in her favour, is a testament to agency within her confined circumstances.

Equally compelling is the fairy's own resistance to the prince's attempted control. Her transformation into a bird can be read as a rejection of the prince's possessiveness, thus asserting her own autonomy. The act of shapeshifting, a motif often associated with fluid identities, emphasises the fairy's ability to transgress the rigid boundaries of the prince's heterosexual matrix.

Another form of subversion is reflected in the prince's own journey. Although the tale remains ensnared in patriarchal and colonial discourse, the prince's learning journey and subsequent transformation imply a critique of these oppressive systems. His initial fixations on specific aesthetic criteria gradually evolve into a more nuanced understanding of love and companionship, defying the narrow confines of beauty myth. While these instances of resistance and transformation are neither comprehensive nor entirely liberating, they underscore the importance of unpacking such narratives through a postcolonial feminist lens. It is through this lens that we can critically examine the socio-

Jean-Jules-Antoine Lecomte du Nouÿ,  
'L'esclave blanche'  
(1888).



political constructs within these tales and discern the subtle moments of resistance and subversion that emerge within them. This lens not only allows us to pinpoint the oppressive structures embedded within such tales but also to envision the potential for alternate narratives that challenge and resist these structures.

'The Enchanted Doe' (ATU 303)<sup>15</sup> tells the story of a king named Giannone, desperate for a child, who follows a pilgrim's advice to have his wife consume the heart of a sea dragon prepared by a young maiden. Both the queen and the maiden give birth to identical boys named Fonzo and Canneloro. The tale reflects patriarchal power structures, wherein male characters like the king and Canneloro hold authority over female characters like Fenicia and the queen. The queen's jealousy of Fonzo's affection for Canneloro over her, and her manipulation in trying to kill Canneloro to ease her jealousy, can be seen as responses to her limited agency within a society dominated by male rulers. Moreover, the ogre's attempt to overpower Canneloro and Fonzo represents a form of masculine dominance and control.

Traditional gender roles shape the characters' actions and relationships in the tale. Women are often portrayed as objects of desire or sources of conflict, as seen in the queen's jealousy and Fenicia's role as a prize in the tournament. These gender roles are reinforced by societal expectations that dictate women's behaviour and constrain their agency.

Despite facing oppression and adversity, female characters in the tale demonstrate resilience and agency. Fenicia's loyalty to Canneloro and her eventual recognition of his true identity highlight her agency and capacity for independent thought. Similarly, the queen's attempts to assert her authority, albeit through nefarious means, can be interpreted as acts of resistance against patriarchal norms.

Examining the interplay of gender, race and power enriches the analysis, offering a deeper understanding of the narrative's complexities. While gender dynamics form a focal point, factors like social status and lineage also wield significant influence over characters' behaviours and interactions. Delving into how these intersecting identities shape characters' experiences enhances our comprehension of the narrative's underlying themes and messages.

'The Enchanted Doe' highlights how the actions of the jealous queen and the journey of the 'twin' brothers reflect gender dynamics and power relations within a patriarchal society. The queen's resentment of Canneloro and her subsequent attempt to kill him demonstrate the harm caused by patriarchal norms and expectations. In such a society, women often face pressure to conform to certain roles and expectations, including the desire to bear male heirs and secure their husband's favour. The queen's jealousy and subsequent actions against Canneloro highlight the destructive consequences of these norms, as she seeks to eliminate a perceived threat to her own power and status. The brothers' journey and their eventual reconciliation illustrate the power of

brotherhood in challenging patriarchal norms. Their joint journey symbolises a collective resistance to patriarchal structures in various forms. Firstly, their unwavering solidarity in the face of adversity symbolises the strength derived from collective action and mutual support, countering the divisive tactics often employed in patriarchal societies. Secondly, their prioritisation of their brotherly bond over societal expectations of male dominance challenges traditional gender roles, highlighting the value of cooperation and mutual respect over competition and aggression. Additionally, the shared agency and decision-making between the two undermine patriarchal notions of male authority, fostering a partnership built on equality and collaboration rather than hierarchical power dynamics. Lastly, by sticking together and supporting each other, Fonzo and Canneloro empower themselves to overcome obstacles, asserting their right to autonomy and self-determination in defiance of oppressive norms.

The ogre in 'The Enchanted Doe' might be interpreted as a manifestation of patriarchal norms, symbolising the deceptive and oppressive nature of gendered expectations. Its shapeshifting abilities, particularly its transformation into a female doe, represent the insidious ways in which patriarchal oppression operates. When the ogre lures Canneloro into its trap by disguising itself, it illustrates how individuals can be enticed into conforming to societal norms and surrendering their agency. However, Canneloro's eventual triumph over the ogre, with the aid of Fonzo and his dogs, symbolises a victory against patriarchal oppression, highlighting the importance of vigilance, solidarity, and resistance in challenging oppressive power dynamics.

To conclude, Giambattista Basile's fairy tales serve as powerful tools for enabling readers to engage critically with complex societal issues. Through narratives like 'The She-Bear', 'The Three Citrons', and 'The Enchanted Doe', Basile skilfully explores themes of gender, race and colonialism, prompting readers to question prevailing ideologies and power dynamics. By applying postcolonial feminist perspectives, readers uncover layers of meaning and symbolism that challenge dominant narratives and offer pathways for resistance and empowerment.

Basile's tales transcend mere entertainment, offering a nuanced examination of gender and race stereotypes, the dehumanisation of women, and the clash between culture and nature. For instance, 'The She-Bear' utilises animalisation as a metaphor to illuminate women's alienation in patriarchal societies while presenting nature as a source of empowerment. Similarly, in 'The Three Citrons', the portrayal of the white heroine's privilege alongside the suffering of the black slave exposes the intersections of race and gender, shedding light on societal inequities. 'The Enchanted Doe' vividly illustrates how the queen's jealousy serves as the catalyst driving the narrative forward. The sons' journey spotlights solidarity's potency in defying oppression.

Basile's fairy tales challenge readers to interrogate societal norms and power structures. By fostering a habit of critical inquiry, readers of all ages are empowered to

navigate the complexities of identity and social justice, envisioning a more equitable and inclusive future. Moreover, for readers and researchers delving into Basile's tales, the use of critical thinking techniques, as advocated by scholars like John Stephens and Maria Nikolajeva,<sup>16</sup> offers a pathway to empowerment. By employing these methods, readers can uncover the nuanced layers within Basile's narratives, exploring the construction and manipulation of subjectivity and its impact on their interpretation of the text.

As we continue to grapple with pressing issues of inequality and discrimination, Basile's tales serve as invaluable tools for inspiring introspection and empathy. Through these stories, readers learn to question, analyse, and challenge the status quo, ultimately guiding them towards greater understanding and empathy for marginalised communities.

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## Davood Khazaie

### Notes

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13. Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.
14. 'I do not want, dear heart, to bring you to my father's land without luxuries worthy of your beautiful person and without a train suitable for a queen. And so climb up this oak tree, where it looks like nature has made a cavity in the form of a little room that suits our very needs, and wait for me until my return, for without delay I'm putting on wings and before this bit of spit dries I'll be back to take you to my kingdom, dressed and accompanied as befits you.' (Basile, *The Tale of Tales*, 448.)
15. Basile, *The Tale of Tales*, 83-90.
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# The Narrative Frame of *Lo Cunto de li cunti*: Structure, Collections, and Paradoxes

Assunta Vitale

**A**fter Morlini's *Novellae* (1520) and Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti* (1551-53), *Lo cunto de li cunti overo lo trattenemiento de' peccerille* (1634-6)<sup>1</sup> written by Giovan Battista Basile is considered one of the first European collections of fairy tales, even though it has a lot of commonalities with the tradition of the novella. Like his predecessors, Basile follows the example of Boccaccio's *Decameron* for the structure of the *Cunto*: a frame tale that contains 49 other tales. However, compared to the preceding collections, the *Cunto*'s frame tale has some peculiarities.

For instance, the temporal and spatial settings of the '*Ntroduzione* diverge significantly from those of its reference models, such as Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti*, which are firmly situated in historical and realistic contexts: the former during the plague epidemic of 1348 in the Florentine countryside and the latter around 1536 on the island of Murano. In contrast, the story of Zoza takes place in an indefinite time and in places of pure invention: it begins with 'Dice ch'era na vota'<sup>2</sup> and it is located in cities of pure invention, i.e. Vallepelosa and Camporetunno. Considering just these two aspects alone, it is clear that the nature of the *Cunto*'s framework is typologically different from its reference models: the narrative frames of the *Decameron* and the *Piacevoli notti* both simulate a realistic situation in which the other tales are told, while Zoza's story is instead like the other 49 tales told in the *Cunto* and therefore not a realistic one.

Turning to the narrative frame tale's structure, it opens with a popular saying and a popular anecdote, 'the monkey tale', that gives the readers moral keys to interpret Zoza's story:

Fu proverbeio de chille strascionate, de la maglia antica, che chi  
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 pede, voze portare corona 'n capo. Ma perché tutto lo stuorto ne porta la mola, e una vene che sconta tutte, all'utemo, avvennose pe mala strata osorpato che che toccava ad autro, 'ncappaie a la rota de li cauce, e quanto se n'era chiù sagliuta 'mperecuocolo, tanto fu maggiore la vrociliata, de la manera sècota.<sup>3</sup>

This structure is repeated in almost every other tale of the book (the only exceptions are 'Petrosinella', 'Li tre ri animale' and 'Sole, Luna e Talia'): they open with a popular saying recited by the woman that tells the tale. Below is an example from the fifth tale of the third day, 'Lo scarrafone, lo sorece e lo grillo':

La fortuna è femmena pontegliosa e fuie de li sapute, perché fanno chiù cunto da le votate de carte che de le girate de na rota; e perzò prattica volentiere co 'gnorante e da poco e non se ne cura, ped avere onore prebeo, de spartire li bene suoie a vozzacchie, de lo munno che ve farraggio sentire ne lo cunto che secoteia.<sup>4</sup>

As with the frame, these expressions and proverbs offer readers a sort of 'moral compass' (sometimes humorous) with which the tales can be read and this moral is also repeated at the end of each tale with a closing proverb. Michele Rak identifies, among the various narrative sources of the *Cunto*, the late medieval *exempla* tradition:<sup>5</sup> every tale is an *exemplum* of good and bad behaviours, including the frame tale, which is essentially a tale demonstrating the perils of deception.

Another key to interpreting the frame is presented at the beginning of the fifth day. All the female storytellers, including Zoza, began to play a game called 'Lo iuoco de li iuoché' (the game of games) with the steward Cola Iacovo. This game mirrors the entire book – even its name reflects the title of the book – and it especially mirrors the fifth day. Just as on the first day, Tadeo after a preliminary speech tells the court how the following days are going to be, the game begins with a speech by Cola Iacovo that can be seen to summarise the entire *Cunto*, before going on to explain the rules of the game:

ordinaie lo prencepe che se facesse quarche iuoco pe trattenemiento de la mogliere; e dato penziero a Cola Iacovo, lo scarco, ommo de granne 'ncegno, isso, sì comme avesse 'n saccocciola le <m>menziune, subeto la trovaie decenno: «Fu sempre 'nsipeto, signure mieie, chillo gusto che non ha quarche rammo de iovamiento; però non foro trovate li

trattenemiente e le veglie pe no piacere dessutele, ma pe no guadagno gostuso perzì; pocca non sulo se vene a passare lo tiempo co sta manera de iuoche, ma se scetano e fanno prunte li 'nciegne a saperese resorvere e a responnere a chello che se demanna, comm'a punto soccede a lo iuoco de li iuoche c'aggio pensato de fare, lo quale sarrà de chesta manera: io proponerraggio a quarche femmena de chesse na sorte de iuoco, la quale senza penzarence m'ha da dicere subeto ca no le piace, e la causa perché no le dace a l'omore, e chi tardarrà a responnere o responnerrà fore de preposito, aggia da pagare la pena, che sarrà fare chella penentenza che commannarrà la signora prencepessa.<sup>6</sup>

The game is played under Tadeo's supervision, just like the storytelling during the five days, in fact he checks every woman's response to Cola lacovo. The quotation below shows the game turns of Zeza, Cecca, Meneca, and Tolla:

E, pe dare prenzipio a lo iuoco, io me vorria ioquare colla signora Zeza na meza patacca a trionfiello». E Zeza subeto respose:

«Non ce voglio ioquare, per chè no so' mariola!». «Bravo – disse Tadeo – ca chi arrobbia ed assassina, chillo trionfa!».

«S'è cossi – leprecaie Cola lacovo –, me trovo no quatto e mezo pe ioquaremillo co la signora Cecca a banco falluto». «No me nge catacuoglie – respose Cecca –, ca non so' mercante!». «Ha ragione – disse Tadeo –, ca pe lloro è fatto sto iuoco».

«A lo manco, signora Meneca – secotaie Cola lacovo –, passammo no paro d'ore a lo male contento». «Perdonateme, ca chisso è fuoco de cortesciane», respose Meneca. «Nge ha dato a lo chiuovo – disse Tadeo –, ca sta razza de gente maie stette de bona voglia».

«Io saccio – repigliaie Cola lacovo – ca la signora Tolla se ioquarrà co mico na seina de pubreche a quatto mentune». «Lo cielo me ne scanze – respose Tolla –, ca chisto è iuoco de marite c'hanno mala mogliere!». «Non potive responnere meglio – respose Tadeo –, ca sto iuoco è fatto pe lloro, che spisso spisso fanno a tozzamartino».<sup>7</sup>

The first eight women play the 'game of games' and each one wins. When it is Ciommetella's turn, Cola lacovo thinks that she hasn't answered correctly, so he says that

she must pay the penalty, but Tadeo convinces him otherwise. This part anticipates the end of the fifth day because the tale that Ciommetella will tell on that last day will be too 'near to the truth' and therefore not like the other tales of the day:

«Senz»altro – repigliaie Cola Iacovo – la signora Ciommetella se contentarrà de iquare co mico a carrettuso». «Merregnao! – response Ciommetella – Bello iuoco de masto de scola m'avive trovato!». «Chessa deve pagare la pena – disse Cola Iacovo –, che non ha che fare la proposta co la risposta». «Va' fatte tornare li denare dallo masto – response lo prencepe –, ca la risposta 'ncascia de Seviglia, perché li pedante iquano cossi bravo a carrettuso che, si be perdeno cinco, sengano la partita». <sup>8</sup>

Finally, when it is Zoza's turn, she loses at the 'game of games' just like she will lose at the 'game of tales' because she won't be able to tell an invented tale like the other female storytellers did.

Ma Cola Iacovo votatose all'utema delle femmene le disse:  
«Non me pozzo dare a credere che la signora Zoza voglia refutare comme l'autre no 'nvito; perrò me farrà piacere ioquarese co mico no cianfrone a sbracare». «Guarda la gamma – response Zoza –, ca chisso è iuoco de peccerelle!». «Ora chessa sí deve fare la penitenzia – concruse Tadeo –, perché a sto iuoco nge iquano pe ffi' a li vecchie, e perzò, signora Lucia, tocca a buie de darele la pena». <sup>9</sup>

These elements highlight the perfect architecture of the frame tale and, therefore, of the *Cunto* itself.

Another feature of the frame tale concerns some elements that can be linked to a typical tendency of Baroque culture, that of collecting. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, wealthy men began to set up collections of *mirabilia* to create what are now called *Wunderkammer*. These chambers of curiosities were created primarily to arouse wonder in the people who visited them, but they also reflected a way of approaching knowledge and bringing order to a reality that they perceived as confused and disorganised. Reading the *Cunto* from this perspective reveals that this book is indeed a literary collection in which many elements of Basile's contemporaneity are incorporated, including words, expressions and proverbs that are all collected by the complex syntax.<sup>10</sup> Of course, this kind of observation can be applied to the whole *Cunto*, especially the *egloghe* (epilogues) that end each day.

On the first day, there is also a collection linked to the 17th century's taste for teratology: the female storytellers are all described by their deformities, creating a small collection of human physical defects:

Tadeo [...] ne scegliette solamente dece, le meglio de la cetate,  
che le parzero chiù provécete e parlettere, che foro Zeza scioffata,  
Cecca storta, Meneca vozzolosa, Tolla nasuta, Popa scartellata,  
Antonella vavosa, Ciulla mussuta, Paola sgargiata, Ciommetella  
zellosa e Iacova squacquarata.<sup>11</sup>

A little bit further on in Tadeo's preliminary discourse is a little collection of professions – 'artisciane', 'mercante', 'dotture', 'potecare' (artisans, merchants, lawyers, shopkeepers) – and another collection of folk literature genres like 'nove fauze, avise <m>mentate e gazzette 'n aiero' ('false news, invented broadsides, and airy gazettes'):<sup>12</sup>

Non è chiù cosa goliosa a lo munno, magne femmene meie, quanto  
lo sentire li fatti d'autro, né senza ragione veduto chillo gran  
felosofo mese l'utema felicità dell'ommo in sentire cunte piacevole,  
pocca ausolianno cose de gusto se spapurano l'affanne, se da sfratto  
a li penziere fastidiuse e s'allonga la vita; pe lo quale desederio vide  
l'artisciane lassare le funnache, li mercante li trafiche, li dotture le  
cause, liotecare le facenne, e vanno canne aperte pe le varvarie e  
pe li rotielle de li chiacchiarune, sentenno nove fauze, avise  
<m>mentate e gazzette 'n aiero. Per la quale cosa devo scusare  
moglierema se l'è schiaffato 'n capo sto omore malancontento de  
sentire cunte.<sup>13</sup>

Also, the introductions to the second, third and fourth days, all taken together, appear as a collection of court and folk entertainments. A collection of court and children's games can be found in the second day:

commenzaro mille iuoches pe gabbare lo tiempo fi all'ora de lo  
mazzecare, no lassannoce né Anca Nicola, né Rota de li cauce, né  
Guarda mogliere, né Covalera, né Compagno mio feruto so', né  
Banno e commannamento, né Ben venga lo mastro, né Rentinola  
mia rentinola, né Scarreca la votta, né Sautaparmo, né Preta 'nzino,  
né Pesce marino 'ncagnalo, né Anola tranola pizza fon-tanola, né Re

mazziero, né Gatta cecata, né La lampa a la lampa, né Stienne mia  
Cortina, né Tafaro e tamburro, né Travo luongo, né Le gallinelle,  
né Lo vecchio no è venuto, né Scarreca varrile, né Mammara  
e nocella, né Sagliepengola, né Li forasciute, né Scarriglia  
mastrodatto, né Vienela vienela, né Che tiene 'n mano? L'aco  
e lo filo, né Auciello auciello maneca de fierro, né Grieco o acito,  
né Aprite le porte a povero farcone.<sup>14</sup>

As in the third, there is a collection of court and folk dances:

e, pe passare allegramente chell'ore che s'erano poste <m>miezo  
fra la matina e l'ora de mangiare, fecero venire li vottafuoch  
e commenzaro co gusto granne ad abballare, facenno Roggiero,  
Villanella, lo Cunto de l'uerco, Sfessania, lo Villano vattuto, Tutto  
lo iuorno co chella palommella, Stordiglione, Vascio de le ninfe,  
la Zingara, la Crapicciosa, la Mia chiara stella, lo Mio doce amoroso  
fuoco, Chella che vao cercanno, la Cianciosa e cianciosella,  
l'Accordamessere, Vascia ed auta, la Chiaranzana co lo Spontapede,  
Guarda de chi me iette a 'nammorare, Rape ca t'è utile, Le nuvole  
che pe l'aria vanno, lo Diavolo 'n cammisa, Campare de speranza,  
Cagn[i]a mano, Cascarda, Spagn[i]oletta, chiodenno li balli co Lucia  
canazza, pe dare gusto a la schiava.<sup>15</sup>

On the fourth day there is another games collection, and then a collection of musical instruments and songs:

Le quale [...] pe dare gusto a Tadeo ed a Lucia commenzaro  
a decorrere si devevano ioquare a secamautone, a capo o croce,  
a cucco o viento, a mazz'e piuzo, a la morra, a paro o sparo, a la  
campana, a le norchie, a le castellucce, ad accostapalla, a chioppa  
o sèpara, a lo tocco, a la palla o a li sbriglie. Ma lo prencepe, ch'era  
sfastediato de tante iuoch, ordenaie che venesse quarche  
strommiento e se cantasse fra tanto; e subeto na mano de serveture  
che se delettavano vennero leste co colasciune, tammorrielle,  
cetole, arpe, chiùchiere, vottafuoch, crò-crò, cacapenziere e zuche  
zuche, e, fatto na bella sofronia e sonato lo Tenore de l'Abbate,

Zefero, Cuccara Giammartino e lo Ballo de Shioienza, se cantattero na maniata de canzune de chillo tiempo buono, che se pò chiù priesto trivoliare che trovare.<sup>16</sup>

Reading again the 'game of games' at the beginning of the fifth day, it is possible to trace two other collections. During the game, in fact, ten card games are quoted that were very popular in the 17th century (trionfiello; banco falluto; lo male contento; quatto mentune; a binte fegure; gabella; chiammare; picchetto; carrettuso; sbracare)<sup>17</sup> and ten types of people (mariola; mercante; cortesciane; marite c'hanno mala mogliere; adulature; femmena mercenaria; sbirro; mormoratore de corte; masto de scola; peccerelle).<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in the frame story alone there are many collections and many others can be traced throughout the book.

Zoza's story reflects the other 49 tales told in the book. It has indeed all the characteristics of the others: indefinite time and space and the presence of supernatural elements. It is a '*cunto piacevole*', a '*nova fauza*', what now is called a fairy tale. However, Zoza's speech in the *Scompetura* – the end of the fifth day and, thereby, of the book – tells otherwise:

Ma Tadeo, che era trasuto 'n grazia sto passatiemo, azzennaie a Zoza che decesse lo suio; la quale fatto la crianza soia, desette: «La verità, signore prencepe, fu sempre mamma dell'odio, e però non vorria che l'obedire a li commanne vostre offenesse quarcuno de chiste che stanno 'ntuorno, perché non essenno usata a fegnere <m>menziune ed a tessere favole so' costretta e pe natura e pe accedente a dire lo vero; e si be' dice lo proverbio: "pscia chiaro e fa' lo fico a lo miedeco", tuttavota sapenno ca la verità non è ricevuta a la presenzia de li princepe, io tremmo de dire cosa che ve faccia fuorze 'nfomare».

«Di' chello che vuoi - response Tadeo ... Ma Zoza fra sto tiempo commenzaie a 'ncantare li circostante co la docezza de le parole, contanno da lo prenzipio a lo fine tutte l'affanne suoie ... Tadeo, che da la lagreme de Zoza e da lo selenzio de la schia va, ch'era ammotuta, comprese e pescaie la verità de lo fatto ...<sup>19</sup>

From Zoza's point of view and, of course, from all the other characters' point of view, her story may coincide with the truth, but the reader can see that her story is like all the others told during the five days. So, by the end of the book, the paradoxical nature of

the frame story is revealed as true and false at the same time: true in the narrative context of the *Cunto*, but false and unrealistic to the reader. This aspect can possibly be related to the literary tastes of the Oziosi academics of Naples: during their gatherings, they used to engage in philosophical-literary exercises, the *paradoxa*, in which a paradoxical theme was discussed in dialogical form.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Basile, who was one of the founding members of the Oziosi Academy, had this kind of literary exercise in mind while writing the *Cunto* and therefore he designed his book in such manner as to create a game with the reader: it is up to the reader to understand the paradoxical nature of the narrative frame and ultimately of the entire book.

Ultimately Basile can indeed be defined as 'The Other Fairy Godfather' and *Lo cunto de li cunti* can undoubtedly be identify as one of the earliest fairy-tale collections of Western Europe, but this book should be read first and foremost as a fine work of Baroque literature.

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### Notes

1. All quotes from the *Cunto* are taken from the Neapolitan version of the text, Giovan Battista Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti overo lo tretteenamiento de' peccerille* (Roma: Salerno, 2013). The endnotes include English translations of the quotes from Giambattista Basile, *The Tale of Tales*, translated by Nancy L. Canepa (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).
2. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 2. Trans.: 'It is said that there once was', in Basile, *Tale of Tales*, Introduction.
3. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 2. Trans.: 'A seasoned proverb of ancient coinage says that those who look for what they should not find what they would not, and it's clear that when the monkey tried putting on boots it got its foot 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. But since the millstone grinds out the chaff and sooner or later everything is paid for, she who deceitfully took from others what was theirs ended up caught in the circle of heels, and however steep her climb up was, her tumble down was even greater. It happened in the manner that follows.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, Introduction.
4. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 534. Trans.: 'Fortune is a stubborn woman who avoids the faces of learned men because they pay more attention to the turning of pages than to the rotation of a wheel. For this reason she more willingly associates with ignorant and paltry people and – in order to receive plebeian glory – does not worry about dividing her goods among the big birds, as I will tell you about in the tale that follows.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, III, 5, 'The cockroach, the mouse and the cricket.'
5. Michele Rak, 'Il sistema dei racconti nel *Cunto de li cunti* di Basile', in *Giovan Battista Basile e l'invenzione della fiaba*, ed. Michelangelo Picone and Alfred Messerli (Ravenna: Longo, 2004), 13-40.
6. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 856-8. Trans.: 'the prince ordered that some games be played as entertainment for his wife. He gave the task to Cola Iacovo, the steward, a man of great ingenuity, and as if his pockets were full of invention he found one right away, saying, "Those tastes that are without some element of advantage, my ladies, have always been insipid. For this reason entertainments and evening gatherings were not devised for worthless pleasure but also for tasty profit, for such manner of games serve not only to pass the time but also awaken and quicken the wits for making decisions and answering what is asked of one, precisely as happens in the game of games that I thought we would play, which goes like this: I'll propose to one of these women here a sort of game, and she, without thinking about it, will immediately have to tell me that she does not like it and the reason why it is not to her liking; and whoever takes too long to answer or does not answer to the point must pay a penalty, which will be whatever penance our lady the princess commands." In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, V.

7. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 858. Trans.: "And so, to begin the game, I would like to play trionfiello with madam Zeza, for half a penny!" And Zeza immediately answered, "I don't want to play, because I'm not a thief!" "Well done!" said Tadeo, "for those who rob and kill are the ones who triumph!" "If that's how it is," replied Cola Iacovo, "I've got a coin worth four and a half that I'd like to use to play break-the-bank with madam Cecca." "You're not getting me," answered Cecca, "for I'm no merchant!" "She's right," said Tadeo, "because this game is made for them." "At least, madam Meneca," continued Cola Iacovo, "let's spend a couple of hours playing malcontent." "I'm sorry, but that's a game for courtiers!" answered Meneca. "She hit the nail on the head," said Tadeo. "That breed of people never does anything with good humor!" "I know," Cola Iacovo resumed, "that madam Tolla will play four corners with me for six old coins." "Heaven save me!" answered Tolla, "that's a game for husbands who have bad wives." "You couldn't have answered better," answered Tadeo. "This game is made for them, since so very often they butt horns like billy goats." In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, V.
8. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 860. Trans.: "Without a doubt," resumed Cola Iacovo, "madam Ciommetella will be content to play pushcart with me." "Fiddledeedee!" answered Ciommetella. "A fine schoolmaster's game you've found for me!" "This one has to pay the penalty," said Cola Iacovo, "since the proposal has nothing to do with the answer." "Go get your money back from the master!" answered the prince. "The answer is a marvelous fit, since pedants play so well at pushcart that even if they lose five points, they put it down as a game won." In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, V.
9. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 860-2. Trans.: "But Cola Iacovo, turning to the last of the women, said, 'I can't believe that madam Zoza would refuse an invitation as the others have done, and so she will give me the pleasure of playing take-off-your-pants with me for a silver coin.'" "Watch out for your legs," answered Zoza, "that's a child's game." "Now this one does have to do the penance," concluded Tadeo, "because even old people play this game, and so, madam Lucia, it's up to you to give her the penalty." In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, V.
10. André Jolles, 'La fiaba nella letteratura occidentale moderna', in *I travestimenti della letteratura. Saggi critici e teorici (1897-1932)*, ed. Silvia Contarini (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), 133: 'Basile è un collezionista. Non solo un collezionista colto che vuole mettere insieme un vocabolario, ma un rigattiere del XVI secolo come lo sono stati Rabelais o Pieter Brueghel, che in un'unica immagine riunisce tutti i giochi infantili e i proverbi conosciuti. Quando gli capita di evocare un gioco, o una canzone, ne nomina subito altri venti per il gusto della collezione: ('Basile is a collector: Not just a learned collector who wants to compile a vocabulary, but a rag-picker of the 16th century like Rabelais or Pieter Brueghel, who in a single image gathers all the children's games and known proverbs. When he happens to evoke a game or a song, he immediately names another twenty for the pleasure of collecting.)
11. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 22. Trans.: 'Tadeo ... 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.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, I.
12. In this regard is useful to mention that the genre here called 'avise <m>mentate', inspired also the Boccacini's *Ragguagli di Parnaso* published between 1612 and 1613. In Boccacini's work (which was originally intended to be titled 'Avvisi dei menanti di Parnaso'), a news letters writer (who likely conceals the author himself) records events at the court of Apollo in Parnassus. He employs the genre of the 'avviso', an ancestor of gazettes and modern newsletters, often attached to diplomatic dispatches in the 16th and 17th centuries.
13. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 22-4. Trans.: '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; since when you lend an ear to tasty items, cares evaporate, irksome thoughts are dispelled, and life is prolonged. And it is because of this desire that you see artisans leave their workshops, merchants their commerce, lawyers their cases, and shopkeepers their businesses, and go open-mouthed to barbershops and gossip circles to hear false news, invented broadsides, and airy gazettes. For this I must apologize on behalf of my wife, who has gotten the melancholic urge to hear tales stuck in her head.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, I.
14. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 286-90. Trans.: 'a thousand games commenced so that the time left before eating might be deceived. And they overlooked neither Anca Nicola; nor the Wheel of Kicks: nor

Watch Your Wife; nor Covalera; nor Buddy of Mine, I'm Wounded; nor Proclamation and Command; nor the Master Is Welcome; nor Little Swallow, My Little Swallow; nor Empty the Cask; nor Jump a Palm's Length; nor Stone in Your Lap; nor Fish in the Sea, Go After Hum; nor Anola Tranola, Pizza Fontanola; nor King Macebearer; nor Blinded Cat; nor Lamp to Lamp; nor Hang My Curtain; nor Butt and Drum; nor Long Beam; nor the Little Hens; nor the Old Man Hasn't Come; nor Empty the Barrel, nor Mammara and Hazelnut, nor Seesaw; nor the Outlaws; nor Argue the Case, Court Clerk; nor Come Out, Come Out; nor What's in Your Hand, the Needle and Thread; nor Bird, Bird, Sleeve of Iron; nor Greco Wine or Vinegar; nor Open the Door for the Poor Falcon.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, II.

15. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 460-2. Trans.: 'And in order to pass in merry fashion the hours that had placed themselves between morning and the time to eat, they had musicians brought in and they began to dance with great pleasure. They did the Ruggiero, the Villanella, the Tale of the Ogre, the Sfessania, the Beaten Peasant, All Day Long with That Little Dove, the Stupefaction, the Nymph's Basso, the Gypsy, the Capricious, My Clear Star, My Sweet Fire of Love, What I'm Looking For, the Charmer and Little Charmer, the Go-Between, Short Lady, Tall Lady, the Chiarantana, Stick Your Foot Out, Look Who I've Gone and Fallen in Love With, Open Up 'Cuz It's a Good Idea, Clouds Floating Up in the Air, the Devil in a Shirt, Living on Hope, Change Hands, the Cascarda, and the Little Spanish Girl, and they closed the dancing with the Lucia Canazza, to please the slave.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, III.
16. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 650-2. Trans.: 'to please Tadeo and Lucia they began to discuss if they should play Saw the Brick Head or Tails, Full or Just Wind, Bat and Stick, Morra, Odds or Evens, Bell Norchie, Little Castles, Get Near the Ball, Put Them Together or Divide Them Up, Touch, ball, or skittles. But the prince, annoyed by so many games, ordered that some instruments be brought in and that in the meantime there be singing. And right away a group of servants who knew how to play rushed out with lutes, tambourines, cithers, harps, pipes, fire throwers, cros-cros, Jew's harps, and zuche-zuche, and after they performed a nice symphony and played "The Tenor of the Abbot", "Zephyr", "Cuccara Giammartino", and "The Dance of Florence", they sang a handful of songs from the good old times that are easier to pine for than to find today.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, IV.
17. Trionfiello; break-the-bank; malcontent; four corners; twenty figures; taxes; summons; picket; pushcart; take-off-your-pants. In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, V.
18. Thief; merchant; courtiers; husbands who have bad wives; flatterers; mercenary woman; cop; court gossip; schoolmaster; child. In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, V.
19. Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 978-80. Trans.: 'But Tadeo, whom this pastime had begun to please, indicated to Zoza that she should tell her tale, and she, after paying her compliments, said "Truth, lord prince, has always been the mother of hatred, and therefore I would not like my obedience to your commands to offend anyone who is here, since, not being accustomed to fabricating inventions and weaving fables, I am constrained by nature and by accident to tell the truth. And although the proverb says, 'Piss clear and make a fig at the doctor', knowing that truth is not always received in the presence of princes I tremble to say something that might make you fume with anger."  
 "Say what you will," answered Tadeo ... In the meantime Zoza began to enchant those present with the sweetness of her words, and told from beginning to end of all her woes. ... From Zoza's tears and the silence of the slave, who had become mute, Tadeo understood and fished out the truth about the matter.' In Basile, *Tale of Tales*, V.
20. Pietro Giulio Riga, *Giovan Battista Manso e la cultura letteraria a Napoli nel primo Seicento. Tasso, Marino, gli Oziosi* (Bologna: I libri di Emil, 2015).

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Tavola Strozzi, view of the city of Naples in Italy from the sea, 1470 (Alfonso V of Aragon's naval victory over John of Anjou). Museo di San Martino, Naples, Italy.



# Neapolitan Tales of Magic between the 15th and the 17th Centuries: Masuccio Salernitano, Girolamo Morlini and Giovan Battista Basile

Giulia Depoli

When we turn our gaze to the origin of the fairy tale, it is crucial to precisely identify what the object of the search is. Ruth Bottigheimer has proposed an articulate and functional definition of this genre of storytelling: a fairy tale occurs when the overall trajectory of a short story firmly incorporates fairy-tale motifs, fairy-tale structure, and a happy ending that includes either the restoration of the status of a character who has fallen into disgrace or the rise to prosperity and wealth of a poor character thanks to a magical element.<sup>1</sup> Considering this definition, the birth of the fairy tale coincides with the works of Giovanni Francesco Straparola (1480–post 1557) and Giovan Battista Basile (1583-1632). But these fairy tales did not come from nowhere, as Bottigheimer herself points out in her book *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic: From Ancient Egypt to the Italian Renaissance*. Even though they were not all interconnected, distinct features of fairy tales had already surfaced in medieval and early modern European literature: for example, magic had already been represented in *lais* and chivalric poems.<sup>2</sup> However, the narrative format adopted by the inventors of the fairy tale, the novella, was not characterised by fairy-tale motifs and structures; on the contrary, traditionally it tended to exclude them. Yet, even prior to the emergence of the first fairy-tale works, between the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance there was a gradual process of opening up the novella to new imaginative realms, which laid the groundwork for the creation of the fairy tale. This paper examines two stages of this process in Southern Italy, focusing on the forms of storytelling in Neapolitan literature during the early modern period, before Basile's collection of tales.

When we think of the Italian novella, we primarily refer to the tradition of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), an essential model for the narrators of the following centuries. Having the *Decameron* (post 1348–ante 1360) as a reference point means considering

a predominantly realistic tradition.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, tales of magic were not foreign to Boccaccio's own cultural horizon. In a famous passage from his Latin treatise *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*, while discussing the veiled meanings of fictional narratives, he outlines what Mario Lavagetto described as a 'snapshot' of oral storytelling,<sup>4</sup> entailing specifically magical creatures:

for not even the craziest old crone keeping vigil around the hearth  
with the young serving girls and telling some tales about the Ogre,  
the Fairies, and Witches, which have been recited many times,  
thinks that she is not including some serious sentiment – to the  
degree that her feeble intellect permits – with which she wants to  
frighten small children, or delight young ladies, or make fun of  
older folks, or at least show the power of Fortune.<sup>5</sup>

So, even if these contents are not given any space in the *Decameron*, it is certain that at the end of the Middle Ages, by the second half of the 1300s, magic tales were alive and well in the context of oral storytelling.

Masuccio Salernitano and Girolamo Morlini, who lived and wrote more than a century later, fully experienced the changed cultural landscape of Renaissance humanism. Therefore, it is worth dwelling on more textual evidence and investigating whether this framing is still applicable to their historical period. Even among the humanists, known to be refined scholars and imitators of the classics, there was no lack of familiarity with tales of magic. Angelo Poliziano (1454-94) provides us with a remarkable insight into the matter, since he deliberately chose a magical character to prompt his opening oration to his university philosophy course on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* in 1492,<sup>6</sup> drawing on the Socratic tradition of using folktales as a tool for philosophy.<sup>7</sup> What matters the most here is that the opening passage of Poliziano's treatise offers a vivid first-person account of magic storytelling. The humanist recalls a recurring experience in his childhood, that of his grandmother telling him stories about Lamias, witches who sucked blood, or even devoured children: 'Haven't you ever heard the name "Lamia"? Even from the time when I was a little boy, my grandmother used to tell me that there were these Lamias in the wilderness, which devoured crying boys. Back then, the Lamia was the thing I dreaded the most, my greatest fear.'<sup>8</sup> Shifting our focus to the Kingdom of Naples, the area that interests us most in this context, Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503), too, in his treatise *De sermone*, completed in the 1490s, mentions the folktales that grandmothers would tell their children to make them fall asleep: 'To these [fables] I will add, unless perhaps it displeases, the so-called old wives' tales such as are told at cradles while little children are awake, for these also can bring delight in the right circumstances.'<sup>9</sup> Although Pontano does not explicitly mention magic, he employs the Latin phrase '*fabulas aniles*', which traditionally refers to narratives containing supernatural elements.<sup>10</sup>

These intellectuals bear witness to the ongoing popularity of tales of magic in cultural circles during this historical period. However, a caveat must be made: all these accounts relate to a strictly oral tradition, which is markedly different from the literary collections analysed here. In her historical study of the fairy tale, Bottigheimer aptly points out:

all references to old women or other people's telling tales or stories before 1550 are just that – references to old women or other people telling stories, and the most we learn about the stories themselves is that some of them had witches or monsters. Inadequate to prove that fairy tales existed in the ancient and medieval worlds, those reports merely validate the existence of storytelling in the ancient world, a fact that has, however, never been in doubt.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, all these humanistic texts highlight an inextricable link between this type of narration and female narrators, especially older women. And ever since Cicero, the old wives' tales (*aniles fabellae*) had had the reputation of being silly and unfounded tales, handed down from person to person thanks to collective – and, particularly, womanly – credulity.<sup>12</sup> This is in stark contrast to the status of individual authorship and high literary value attributed to the Italian novella, written by male authors from Boccaccio onwards.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, this representation also implies an audience limited to children, or even infants. Instead, I want to focus on literature, and specifically on the tradition of the Italian novella, that is the milieu in which the fairy tale took shape, to assess what kind of influence this magical storytelling background had within the works of Renaissance professional writers before Basile openly incorporated its elements in his fairy tales. This is not to endorse the notion that fairy tales were pre-existing oral narrations subsequently transcribed into written form, a theory that Bottigheimer has already cast doubt upon.<sup>14</sup> Rather, I intend to examine the process by which specific components inherent to oral folk narratives, such as magical motifs and stories about fairies, were assimilated into literary short stories. We can find evidence of such a process in a letter by Francesco Petrarca to the cardinal Giovanni Colonna, in which he recounts how, during a journey to Aachen in 1333, he came to learn of a magical adventure that occurred to Charlemagne:

I saw the abode of Charles, Aix, as well as his tomb in a marble shrine, frightening to the barbarians. There from the clergy appointed to the shrine I heard a rather amusing story which they showed me as it had been written and which afterward I read in a more discreet form as recounted by modern writers. I should now like to tell it to you ...<sup>15</sup>

Petrarca was told the tale of Charlemagne by clergymen living in Aachen, but they were also able to provide a written version of such tale, which was later reworked by professional writers, among whom we now find Petrarca himself. This passage illuminates the permeable boundaries between oral and written storytelling, showing how magical tales shifted between written texts and spoken word over time.

There are several elements of compatibility between magical folktales in the Italian literary genre and the novella, which allowed for mutual exchanges.<sup>16</sup> Both are short narrative forms, which often deal with common themes and motifs, such as the adventure of a hero, difficult tasks, perilous journeys through forests, recognition of the hero, the final achievement of a marriage, and so on. Moreover, even though the novella is a literary product, it pivots on an insistent fiction of orality: the fictional framework of these collections of stories always depicts one or more narrators in the act of telling the stories to an audience of listeners.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the novella adopts many oral storytelling devices, which liken it to the folktale. Finally, the novella is famously very versatile, a protean literary genre with no strict codification, therefore prone to experimentation and intermingling with other textual types.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these inherent factors of compatibility, I argue that between the 15th and 16th centuries the novella's openness to contamination with folklore magic might have also been favoured by a cultural shift. Alongside the blooming of Renaissance courts and their refined customs, this historical period is also known for the emergence of modern demonology and the new role of the Inquisition.<sup>19</sup> From the 15th century onward, Christian theologians shifted away from the belief in the unreal nature of magic, and began to view it as a tangible threat, associated with heretical movements and demonic influence.<sup>20</sup> Boccaccio's imitators in the early modern period wrote their stories in a changed intellectual context, in which the supernatural entered the previously sceptical educated discourse.<sup>21</sup> An intriguing testimony of this widespread perception can be found in a text from the circle of Masuccio Salernitano: the *Ricordi*, a memoir written by Loise De Rosa (1385–post 1475), head servant in the Neapolitan court through successive generations of Angevin and Aragonese rulers.<sup>22</sup> In his account of historical events, De Rosa recounts numerous supernatural incidents, but what stands out most is his portrayal of how even high-ranking ecclesiastical figures believed in magic. In one passage, he claims that the pope himself, worried about King Alfonso V of Aragon's intense affection for the Neapolitan Lucrezia d'Alagno, suggested to the king that the young woman must have bewitched (*'affatturato'*) him, given her acquaintance with the city's witches (*'vecchie fattuchiare'*).<sup>23</sup> While not being a reliable historical source, De Rosa is representative of a widespread mindset and imagination that attributes to the Church of the time a concrete concern for magic.

In this context, since the novella mostly portrays the society and culture of its time, it would not be surprising to see the incorporation of commonly held magical elements within its plots. Nonetheless, it still strived to adhere to the model of Boccaccio and

remained a predominantly realistic genre. This is just the first of several factors that, conversely, seem to make this genre incompatible with magical motifs, coming both from folklore and other literary traditions which employed magic in their plots, such as chivalric poems. Generally speaking, the setting of the novellas remained historically and geographically defined, portraying characters with a verisimilar individual psychology and social background. Additionally, the imitation of the Boccaccian model also included the adoption of certain plots from the *Decameron*, in which belief in magic was associated with the lower sociocultural strata and mocked. These formal and thematic characteristics of the genre meant that magical narrative materials were not integrally and openly included in the novella from the get-go. In order to be incorporated into this literary genre, they needed to be adapted to suit the narrative framework characteristic of the novella.

The dynamics of this process are consistent with the conduit theory, developed by Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi to explain the stability in oral transmission of folkloric materials such as legends or folktales over time. Contrary to the way other types of messages often degrade from person to person, a message like a folktale tends to remain relatively unchanged throughout its transmission, even over extended periods of time, as long as it stays within its 'conduit'. In this context, by conduit, we mean 'individuals united by similar mind-sets – people who react similarly to similar messages ... within given systems of communication'.<sup>24</sup> As Dégh argues,

If a message – a folklore text – travels through its proper conduit, it goes unchanged from one person to another; however, if the message, on its course, reaches an inappropriate individual, it will either reach a dead end or survive by undergoing modifications, and thereby, the message deviates from its original trail and lands in another conduit whose members respond to the modified message.<sup>25</sup>

In some respects this theory can also apply to written narratives. Consider a scenario where a message such as a tale of magic or a magical theme circulates orally: its transition from oral circulation to the hands of a novella author undertaking their literary composition results in its departure from its original conduit, leading to alterations. To some extent, the same can also apply to the transition of a tale of magic or a magical theme from one literary genre to another: as proposed by Francesco Orlando, drawing from Roman Jakobson's framework,<sup>26</sup> even a literary work can be conceived as a message emitted from a sender (the author) to a receiver (the intended audience) within a specific context and through a code constituted by the conventions of the literary genre to which it belongs.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, a tale of magic or a magical theme may circulate nearly unchanged, for instance, from one

poem on the Matter of Britain to another, but if it were read there and subsequently reworked by a novella author for their own target audience, it would undergo modifications, in accordance with the formal and thematic norms of this literary genre. Initially, magic entered the new conduit of the novella as if in disguise; but slowly it began to break through the conventions of the literary genre, and with their alteration, this conduit became more suitable for accommodating it.

An example of this process is a novella by Tommaso Guardati, better known as Masuccio Salernitano, who was born at the beginning of the 15th century in a respected, landowning family originally from Sorrento. His father served as a secretary for Raimondo Orsini, prince of Salerno, and therefore moved the family to the city that identifies Masuccio to this day. After the complex succession events to the Neapolitan throne among the houses of Durazzo, Anjou, and Aragon, Tommaso also found employment in the noble courts of Salerno and Naples, ending up as the personal secretary of Roberto di Sanseverino, prince of Salerno from 1463. Between the 1450s and the early 1470s, Masuccio composed a collection of 50 novellas called *Il novellino*, which overtly takes after Boccaccio's *Decameron* in its structure and themes.<sup>28</sup> It was published in 1476, shortly after the author's death.

Let us consider the 26th novella. In this story, a young woman from Naples finds herself smitten with a boy she glimpses while passing in the street. Despite the intensity of her passion, she knows lovers to be loose-lipped, so she exercises self-restraint and devises a clever plan to enjoy his company while safeguarding her reputation. She asks a relative of hers to disguise himself and meet the young man and instruct him to come to the front of the church of San Giovanni Maggiore that evening. There, the beloved meets the woman's relative again, who informs him of his fortunate fate: a young and beautiful lady desires his love, but to win it, he must allow himself to be led to her while blindfolded, to prevent him from recognising her identity. The young man agrees to these conditions of privacy and meets the mysterious lady in a dark room in her house, where they spend the night together. In order to officially become her lover and be able to see her again, he must swear to keep their relationship utterly secret.

The protagonist consents, but immediately breaks his promise by telling his closest friend all about his new, mysterious lover. Unfortunately, this confidant happens to be a courtier, who wastes no time in recounting the incident at the palace, pretending it occurred in the land of France. Unbeknownst to the friend, one of the listeners happens to be the same relative of the young woman who had facilitated the nighttime meeting: he promptly tells her of her lover's breach of secrecy. Disappointed yet resolute, the woman concludes that the affair is not worth the trouble. With no desire to become the subject of Neapolitan gossip, she decides it is wiser to avoid any further encounters with the young man and seek a more discreet lover for herself.<sup>29</sup>

What may appear at first glance to be a spicy tale set against the backdrop of contemporary Naples, amidst courtly gossip and rumours, is an extremely original

# TERTIA PARTE

un coltello se haurebe uoluntaria d'uita puata put  
mentre che colui hauea plato lei senza respodere a  
una sola parola nò era mai rimasta de amaramente  
pianger. Ma fine p fare il suo uolere dal lecto tolta se  
d'occamente chiamato il moro & còe il iouane uol  
se tutti doi posse fori di casa & serano luscio dolente  
a morte & cò tate lachryme che una fite ne haue-  
ua rimasta uota ala sua camera sene resteno oue  
còe colante capode d'còtinao dimoradio o che do-  
lote o uenieno lo hauesse canuto i beui di mori il  
nobile giourne hauendo il fado disuolgato & del  
castigo de de la morte haunto mirabile piacere re-  
còparato il moro & posto i libera lui a cho libero  
& fcolto damore grà tēpo cò felicità uisse godē-  
do la sua fiorita giouēta.

Mafuccio.

Iu di dugi feta o mai incredolo ascolta-  
do qle si uolia còrta ribaldaria de fem-  
mine le recitate p la mēte remolgēdo se  
che mogli para con gli occhi haueua ue-  
duta. Io da la uergogna de me medemo raffena-  
to che puto còe li altri da femina sono mēto me  
rimingo che dire qdo loro assilte dala grā fōia &  
strenata zaba p meno errare fecōdo il loro credere  
adopetano lo saluo honorifice tu che legi me in-  
tēdi nò te bisogna cosa & sene dubiti troua un al-  
tro che d'chata tali oculi termini pu chio cōqlo  
ancora me restō de scriuere de molte altre piu de  
focosa luxuria occore q' temēdo de effeme pale-  
fate o p nò aduuliti a homini de bassa forte se so-  
to pongono a gli aiali beui si cōe p uenissimo ho  
sentito & cò pui experiente toccato cò manoscritta  
le nescido opare le pui d' lenolte e mādato ad esse-  
sto da coloro che son ote tēgono piu che laltre fa-  
ue dale cui ragiōe mōtia una fagace dōna che ap-  
pōsto racōtare itēdo qle effēdo iprouista fiera men-  
te pōia de uno ligadiō giouane seppē tātō se me-  
desimo rassenate che ancora suo deliderio fassia-  
cesse mai ad giouene fo concesso cognoscerla uide  
che le laltre da costei togliessero exēpio pochi ne  
ferebēdo da gli homini uutilate. Argomēto.

Vna dōna d' un ligadiō giouane innamorata p  
un suo puato trascelto sel fa uelato i camera cò  
diare gode cò lui una notte dagli il modo còe &  
qdo da lei ha aromare. Al giouane sene fida a uno  
fuo amico ala dōna il fete & mai piu remāda p lui  
Ala magnifica Praxiscilla de monico. Nouella.  
uigilissima.

Exordio.

Iu uolte ragionando teo magnifica &  
colēdissima mia cōmar me ricordo ha-  
ueme trasfēro che q'riche rasilime se-  
mine se possano de prudētia comēdare  
pēfido cò q'ci māmēti se haue la natura pōute  
put tene trouare alcūe qle cōe meno iprudēti de  
laltre nò possēdon alla libidine separare & p q'lo  
cercano cò ante noua cautela alloro defendēti fatis-  
fice se posseno meno che laltre blasfmate qle solo  
cò lo effēdere le legi dno uiolētare la debile loro  
natura occultamēte faciano illor appetiti. Si còe da  
la fegēte nouella sceremo partimēte i sul nostro  
credere cōfirmati acio che cò lasciolate isēmū me

scoldo possi cò teo medesimo uero iudicio da-  
re se oltre il peccato la dōna ne deue esser i per al-  
cua cōmēdazio se al numero de le altre scelerate  
la possi & meritamēte accòpagnare. Vale.



Narratione.

El tēpo còl pūtolice trasfērodo p lo no-  
stro regno tātū miracoli facca nella cita  
de napoli il sotto scripto itano caso de  
uero itenemēto qle fu che un fabbar da  
feto nel mēse de marzo che le brigate andāo alle  
ca māmūta fitteta d' ligadiē dōne hanēdo fecō-  
do loro credere la pdomita guadagnata loro uē-  
ne nel disio de ritornarse a casa p fori la cita: & ef-  
fēdo a qlla itata che uā da tranfero alle padule se  
abbatterono i una brigata d' gioueni nò meno d'  
belleza ch' d' nobilita cian ch' p loro piaceuole ex-  
ercitio iocūmo ala palla del maglio oue accade  
che una del le dūte dōne de grā belleze & dē fero  
magior pōsto gli occhi adolo ad uno delli dicti  
gioueni che fegoparello d' damasco uende itana  
& i maneta piaciutoi che tutta se fitta uenisse me  
no puro cò la prudētia uēta i per la fēssalita fēra  
nōstrame alcio segno cò laltre ibēti cò grādissi-  
ma passioe del piaciuto giouane a casa sene re-  
uocōtomo a tal amore còe hauesse possuto haue-  
re itiero effecto cōincio molte & diuerse uie a tra-  
fcomere & q'ntūq' amore hauesse omēuto il fōmo  
loco d' il suo cōseput nò era tātō fori d' se uscita ch'  
nò cognoscesse cò pōch uolte uolēdo alla amoro-  
sa passioe fassifare itēto secreto fia la tela tramata  
nò se po p lōgo spacio occulto tener cò che nò e-  
niūo al mōdo che nò habia uno pfecto amico cò  
loqle se cōmōica tutti isoi bōi & rei aduenimēti  
& quello tale ne haueua un altro alloquale niuno  
fuo ne daltui secreto tēnea occultato: & cōfi da  
uno in altro fūmo molto spēdo le cōte felicitā  
de gli amanti con longēmi serie terminate & p q'  
lo se deue credere che lei pigliasse per ultimo par-  
tito o tale amore con un mirabile & itano pen-  
siero haueu compimento o remanēse del tut-  
to itanto fosse dal disio uinta & a morte recu-  
ta & per dare al fado con la celenita expedimento  
hauendo uno fuo parente del quale fidare si pos-  
sea & alui discoperta la sua passioe i in breue  
parole gli ordino a fare cio che hauea demō cò  
lui che obsequioso gli era ando spaciatamen-

adaptation of a tale of magic,<sup>30</sup> which Laurence Harf-Lancner named the Melusinian plot.<sup>31</sup> The *Lai de Lanval* (written around 1170) by Marie de France<sup>32</sup> was the most famous literary version of this narrative structure during Masuccio's time.<sup>33</sup> In these narratives, a supernatural female character, often a fairy, falls in love with a mortal young man.<sup>34</sup> Her identity is unknown: she is only described as being beautiful and rich.<sup>35</sup> In the plot of the *Lanval*, the woman is unable to reveal herself directly and uses an intermediary to lead the beloved to her and enjoy his love.<sup>36</sup> The central core of the plot revolves around an interdiction imposed on the man: if he respects this condition, he can receive love and fortune.<sup>37</sup> However, the prohibition is unfailingly broken, and the man loses the favour of the woman.<sup>38</sup> In the end, the fairy may forgive the man, as in the case of *Lanval*, or she may abandon him to his fate for not keeping his promise.<sup>39</sup>

The crucial point of the Melusinian plot concerns the prohibition connected to the relationship arising from a fundamental taboo, which animates various tales of magic and fairy tales: the supernatural world cannot mix with the human one.<sup>40</sup> This is precisely what makes Masuccio's operation so interesting, as he includes the fairy-tale plot in his collection of novellas only on the condition of immersing it in complete realism, thereby adhering to the Boccaccian convention of the genre, but at the same time nullifying the supernatural element. Unlike *Lanval's* mysterious lady, in this tale the woman has no magical powers: what makes her extraordinary is her sense and prudence.<sup>41</sup> It should be specified that Masuccio's collection of novellas is fueled by a strongly misogynistic vein, so, for the author, a wise woman is something bordering on the supernatural – we have proof of this in the proemial epistle which introduces the novella, stating that 'although very few women can be commended for their prudence, taking into account how very defective Nature has made them, some however can be found who are less imprudent than the rest'.<sup>42</sup> However, in the absence of the taboo related to the tale of magic, Masuccio must find a new motivation for the interdiction to keep it in his plot. His solution is based on the ideal of the so-called perfect friendship, a very popular theme in Renaissance humanism, rooted in principles inherited from Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy.<sup>43</sup> Masuccio, nonetheless, seems rather sceptical of the actual realisation of such ideal friendship in his days.<sup>44</sup> In that era, as the protagonist of Masuccio's story claims, no one lacked a 'perfect friend', that is, a best friend to whom they can tell everything. However, this friend, in turn, might have another best friend to whom they can tell everything respectively, and so on. Therefore, the woman wants to keep her affair hidden, to protect herself from this chain of open-hearted confessions between friend and friend, which inevitably degenerates into collective gossip.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Masuccio's novella maintains the magic tale structure, but not the original magical element coming from the traditional version of the tale.

The second type of interdiction present in the novella is not found in the *Lanval*-like narrations, but is present in other renditions of the Melusinian plot: not only it is forbidden

to speak to anyone about the relationship, but the magical lover cannot even be seen.<sup>46</sup> The protagonist encounters the young Neapolitan woman in a completely dark room, where he has been led while blindfolded. This motif has its most famous embodiment in the story of Cupid and Psyche.<sup>47</sup> The underlying principle is always the censorship of the supernatural element, even to the human lovers themselves. It is precisely this element that brings Masuccio's novella closer to the rendition of this plot by Giovan Battista Basile, specifically the ninth *trattenimento* (entertainment) of the second day, entitled 'The Padlock' ('Lo catenaccio').<sup>48</sup>

In Basile's fairy tale, the genders are reversed and match the Cupid-Psyche dynamic. Luciella, a very poor girl, while going to fetch water from a fountain, is stopped by a slave who invites her to follow him through a cave to a beautiful palace. Here, Luciella receives lavish banquets and beautiful clothes.<sup>49</sup> At night, a mysterious young man hidden in darkness lies down in bed with her; only to vanish as soon as day breaks.<sup>50</sup> When Luciella wishes to return home, she is forbidden to speak about the palace and the origin of her newfound wealth: 'he reminded her ... to tell no one where she was coming from or where she was staying'<sup>51</sup>. One night, prompted by her jealous sisters, Luciella decides to break the prohibition and stay awake to light up the room and finally see her lover's face.<sup>52</sup> She discovers that he is a handsome young man, but is subsequently stripped of her riches and expelled from the palace for her disobedience.<sup>53</sup> In the last sequence of the story, it is revealed that the man is actually a prince forced to live in hiding and wandering due to a curse.<sup>54</sup> Once the spell is broken, the handsome prince and Luciella can live happily ever after together.<sup>55</sup>

Both Masuccio's novella and Basile's *cunto* are two different, yet closely related variants of the Melusinian plot. The tales of these two authors testify to the persistence of this type of magic tale in Naples between the 15th and 17th centuries. However, Masuccio resorts to a realistic camouflage, still far from the 'rise fairy tale'<sup>56</sup> crafted by Basile.

In the timespan between Masuccio Salernitano and Giovan Battista Basile, another, perhaps lesser-known, Neapolitan author took a step closer to the fairy tale by retaining the magical elements in his short stories. There is scant information available about him: Girolamo Morlini was born in the last quarter of the 15th century, and he is presumed to have died after 1528. He was a law professor at the Studium of Naples.<sup>57</sup> He wrote a peculiar collection of 81 novellas, 20 Aesopic fables in Latin, and a comedy, which was published in 1520 with the simple title of *Novellae*.<sup>58</sup>

In Morlini's *Novellae*, genuine magical elements coexist with realistic concealments. We still find instances in which the supernatural turns out to be fake and is subject to scepticism: this is the case with the *novelle di beffa* (that is to say prank tales),<sup>59</sup> in which, according to a well-established tradition, only the gullible can truly believe in magic and otherworldly creatures. A prime illustration of this is Morlini's 28th novella: every night, a woman cheats on her husband with a lover, right in their own bridal bed;<sup>60</sup> one night,

the husband notices the presence of the other man, but the woman makes him believe that it is a ghost haunting the house.<sup>61</sup> Critics have pointed out a similar story in the *Cene* (1549), the collection of novellas by Anton Francesco Grazzini (1505-84).<sup>62</sup> A close, albeit less racy, precedent might be already found in the first novella of the seventh day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

However, Morlini proves to be truly innovative in including cases of authentic magic among the novellas, foreshadowing Basile's later developments. Often, however, magical themes are cast in a grotesque and desecrating narrative, contrary to what we find in fairy tales.<sup>63</sup> An example of this is the treatment of the recurring motif of talking animals helping the hero: in the 60th novella, birds reveal the presence of a hidden treasure to a man, but the communication is made possible thanks to a magical herb that the man is accidentally using to clean himself.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, the magic in the 25th novella is all but laughable. A young man hears a voice coming from a tomb and goes to the rescue of a blind man who had fallen into it. Then, he heads towards the house of Phillis, the girl he loves, but stops on the way again to help a hanged man, who asks for assistance. This corpse turns out to be possessed ('*larvatus*')<sup>65</sup> by a demonic spirit ('*calconida*').<sup>66</sup> Due to the hero's good deeds, this supernatural being spares his soul and even becomes his helper, as he uses his powers to kill the girl's relatives who were waiting for the young man in an ambush.<sup>67</sup> In this uncanny tale of magic, Morlini unironically incorporates typical magical motifs such as the unquiet grave, demonic possessions and, most notably, otherworldly help as a reward for acts of kindness. Gianni Villani referred to Tale Types E300-399, generically designated as 'Friendly return of the dead', in Rotunda's motif index;<sup>68</sup> however, it is possible to link this tale to a much more relevant entry in Thompson's Tale Type E366.2: 'Hanged man warns youth against visiting sweetheart. Takes youth's place and receives shot meant for him.'<sup>69</sup> Magical motifs alone do not make a fairy tale, but they are a fundamental ingredient in its construction: their full integration into Neapolitan novellas marks a significant advancement towards Basile's creation.

It is no coincidence that Morlini himself was a model of primary importance for Straparola, who a few decades later included some actual rewritings of these Latin novellas in his *Piacevoli notti* (1550-3).<sup>70</sup> The fact that even the Northern Italian Straparola was influenced by a Neapolitan author shows that Renaissance Naples was a sort of propulsive centre of magic novellas, leaving an indelible mark in the history of the narrative genre of the fairy tale.

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**Giulia Depoli**

## Notes

1. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales: A New History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 8-13; see also Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)..
2. See Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic: From Ancient Egypt to the Italian Renaissance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
3. Erich Auerbach, *Zur Technik der Frührenaissancenovelle in Italien und Frankreich*, 2nd edition (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1971), 1; Cesare Segre, 'La novella e i generi letterari', in *La novella italiana: Atti del Convegno di Caprarola; 19-24 settembre 1988*, ed. Enrico Malato (Rome: Salerno, 1989), vol. 1, 48; Bottigheimer, *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic*, 148-9.
4. Mario Lavagetto, 'Dal buio delle notti invernali', in *Racconti di orchi, di fate e di streghe: La fiaba letteraria in Italia*, ed. Mario Lavagetto (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), xi.
5. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* 14.10.7, trans. Suzanne Magnanini as 'Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* (begun circa 1350)', in *Fairy Tales Framed: Early Forewords, Afterwords, and Critical Words*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 21.
6. Christopher S. Celenza, 'Poliziano's *Lamia* in Context', in *Angelo Poliziano's 'Lamia': Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies*, ed. Christopher S. Celenza (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1-45.
7. Plato, *Gorgias*, 527a.
8. Angelo Poliziano, *Lamia*, trans. and ed. Christopher S. Celenza, in *Angelo Poliziano's 'Lamia': Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies*, ed. Christopher S. Celenza (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 195.
9. Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *The Virtues and Vices of Speech*, trans. and ed. G.W. Pigman III, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 243.
10. For a history of this phrase in Latin up to the Middle Ages, see Matteo Massaro, '*Aniles fabellae*', *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 49 (1977): 104-35.
11. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales*, 2.
12. Massaro, '*Aniles fabellae*'; Marina Montesano, *Fantasma, fantasma che di notte vai: La cultura magica delle novelle toscane del Trecento* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2000), 33-4.
13. Michelangelo Picone, 'L'invenzione della novella italiana: Tradizione e innovazione', in *La novella italiana*, vol. 1, 119-27; Gabriella Albanese, 'Da Petrarca a Piccolomini: Codificazione della novella umanistica', in *Favole paraboliche storie: Le forme della scrittura novellistica dal Medioevo al Rinascimento; Atti del Convegno di Pisa; 26-28 ottobre 1998*, eds. Gabriella Albanese, Lucia Battaglia Ricci, and Rossella Bessi (Rome: Salerno, 2000), 257-308.
14. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales*, 1-26.
15. Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters (Rerum Familiarium Libri)*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: Italica Press, 2005), 26.
16. Lavagetto, 'Dal buio delle notti invernali'; Laura Diafani, Fabrizio Scrivano, and Debora Vitali (eds), introduction to *La fiaba prima della fiaba nella novella italiana dal Due al Seicento: Antologia* (Perugia, Morlacchi, 2018), 9-18. It is important to note that these authors conflate folktale and fairy tale, in contrast with Ruth Bottigheimer: their contribution remains valid regarding the permeability of the novella to elements of oral storytelling, such as magical folklore.
17. Giancarlo Alfano, *Nelle maglie della voce: Oralità e testualità da Boccaccio a Basile* (Naples: Liguori, 2006).
18. With regard to the blending of literary genres at the birth of the novella, see Hans Robert Jauss, 'The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature', trans. Timothy Bahti, *New Literary History* 10, no. 2 (1979): 208-22; Segre, 'La novella e i generi letterari'; Picone, 'L'invenzione della novella italiana'; with regard to its constant tendency to merge with other literary genres, especially in the 16th century, see Sandra Carapezza, *Novelle e novellieri: Forme della narrazione breve nel Cinquecento* (Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie, 2011), 11-13.
19. See Franco Cardini, *Magia, stregoneria, superstizioni nell'Occidente medievale* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1979); Sergio Abbiati, Attilio Agnoletto, and Maria Rosario Lazzati (eds), *La stregoneria: Diavoli, streghe,*

- inquisitori dal Trecento al Settecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1984); Charles Zika, *Exorcising our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Colette Arnould, *La stregoneria: Storia di una follia profondamente umana* (Bari: Dedalo, 2011); Julian Goodare, Rita Voltmer, and Liv Helene Willumsen (eds), *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020).
20. Montesano, *Fantasima, fantasima che di notte vai*, 27, 38.
  21. Giulia Depoli, "'Un giuoco multo spaventevole': Ars Necromantica in 15th-Century Vernacular Novella", *Notes in Italian Studies* 2 (2023): 5-14.
  22. Loise De Rosa, *Ricordi*, ed. Vittorio Formentin (Rome: Salerno, 1998), 1:13-25.
  23. De Rosa, *Ricordi*, 2:638.
  24. Linda Dégh, 'Conduit theory/multiconduit theory', in *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*, ed. Thomas A. Green (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 142.
  25. Dégh, 'Conduit theory', 142.
  26. Jakobson's framework of language distinguishes six factors that are necessary in communication: a context in which communication occurs, a sender (addresser) of the communication, its receiver (addressee), the contact between the two, a common code that allows reciprocal understanding, and the message of the communication itself. See Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1960), 350-449.
  27. Francesco Orlando, *Per una teoria freudiana della letteratura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), 10-13. Translated by Charmaine Lee as *Toward a Freudian Theory of Literature: With an Analysis of Racine's Phedre* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 125-7.
  28. See Michael Papio, introduction to *A New Translation of the 'Novellino' of Masuccio Salernitano*, trans. Christopher Stace (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2022), xiii-xxix, for a new and updated profile of Masuccio Salernitano in English and the main bibliographical sources on this author.
  29. Stace (trans.), *A New Translation of the 'Novellino'*, 242-5.
  30. For a complete discussion of this case, see Giulia Depoli, 'Il *Lanval* umanistico di Masuccio Salernitano', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, no. 199 (2022): 522-42.
  31. Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine; La naissance des fées* (Paris: Champion, 1984).
  32. See Glyn S. Burgess, *The 'Lais' of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 1-34.
  33. On the fortune of the *Lai de Lanval* in Italy until the end of the 14th century, see Maria Bendinelli-Predelli, 'Storia delle storie di Lanval', *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, no. 6 (1985): 1-30.
  34. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 9-10.
  35. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 91-2.
  36. Marie de France, *Poetry: New Translations, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, trans. and ed. Dorothy Gilbert (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 67-8, lines 53-81.
  37. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 9-10, 94-101.
  38. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*; 102-8.
  39. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 111-12.
  40. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 92.
  41. Stace (trans.), *A New Translation of the 'Novellino'*, 242.
  42. Stace (trans.), *A New Translation of the 'Novellino'*, 241.
  43. See Jean Claude Fraisse, *Philia: La Notion D'Amitié Dans La Philosophie Antique* (Paris: Vrin, 1974); Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1995); Luigi Pizzolato, *L'idea di amicizia nel mondo antico classico e cristiano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993); Annalisa Ceron, *Le amicizie degli Antichi e dei Moderni* (Pisa: ETS, 2021), 59-184.
  44. See Depoli, 'Il *Lanval* umanistico di Masuccio', 531-42.
  45. Stace (trans.), *A New Translation of the 'Novellino'*, 242.
  46. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, 97-8.

47. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 4.27-6.24.
48. Giambattista Basile, *The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*, trans. Nancy L. Canepa (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 199.
49. Basile, *The Tale of Tales*, 200.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. Basile, *The Tale of Tales*, 201.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Basile, *The Tale of Tales*, 201-2.
55. Basile, *The Tale of Tales*, 202.
56. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales*, 11-13.
57. On Morlini's life, see Giovanni Villani, 'Nota biografica', in Girolamo Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, trans. and ed. Giovanni Villani (Rome: Salerno, 1983), xlvii-xlix; and *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, s.v. 'Morlini, Girolamo' by Franco Pignatti, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/girolamo-morlini\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/girolamo-morlini_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed 21 March 2024). I am not aware of any updated essay on the life of Girolamo Morlini in English.
58. Giovanni Villani, introduction to Girolamo Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, trans. and ed. Giovanni Villani (Rome: Salerno, 1983), ix-xlvi.
59. A more exhaustive definition of the *novella di beffa* can be found in William Robins, 'Introduction', in *The 'Decameron' Eighth Day in Perspective*, ed. William Robins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 3-5.
60. Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 136.
61. Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 138.
62. Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 136n1.
63. In a manner similar to that described by Bottigheimer, *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic*, 65.
64. Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 272.
65. Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 122.
66. This term is only documented within Morlini's text: Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 122n3.
67. Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 120, 122.
68. Morlini, *Novelle e favole*, 118n1; Dominic P. Rotunda, *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella in Prose* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1942), 14.
69. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 2:435.
70. Marziano Guglielminetti, 'Dalle "novellae" del Morlini alle "favole" dello Straparola', in *Medioevo e Rinascimento veneto con altri studi in in onore di Lino Lazzarini*, ed. Guido Billanovich et al. (Padua: Antenore, 1979), 2:69-81; Giovanni Villani, 'Da Morlini a Straparola: Problemi di traduzione e problemi di testo', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 169 (1982): 66-73.



'Apollo and Daphne'  
attributed to Piero del  
Pollaiuolo Apollo (1410).

# Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' (Book 1, Story 2) and Basile's 'The Myrtle' (Day 1, Story 2): Texts and Performance

Ruth B. Bottigheimer

**T**he Roman author Publius Ovidius Naso, familiarly known as Ovid (43 BCE – 17/18 CE), filled 15 books with stories about – as he put it – 'bodies which have been transformed into shapes of a different kind'.<sup>1</sup> Unsurprisingly, he titled the resulting composition *Metamorphoses*. A prologue contains the creation of 'the ordered universes [and] the creation of man' and ends with a flood that destroys all but one virtuous couple, Deucalion and Pyrrha. Now begin the metamorphoses of Book 1: as Deucalion and Pyrrha cast rocks behind them, the rocks turn into living creatures and thus they repopulate the world with people and animals. The very next story of metamorphosis in Book 1, 'Daphne and Apollo', begins with Apollo's killing the monstrously huge, hillsides-covering Python.<sup>2</sup> Directly after this heroic deed, he falls irretrievably in love with Daphne, who rejects his love and eventually changes into a tree to escape his fervour.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, the Neapolitan Giambattista Basile (1575–1632) framed his *Pentamerone* not cosmic-ally, as Ovid did, but by events in the lives of an old woman and a young princess. The crone instructs Princess Zoza to revive Prince Tadeo by filling a jug with her tears, to do which she must cry as much as did Egeria. Basile introduces Egeria without identifying her, as though his readers or listeners would instantly recognise her and her weeping.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Egeria's story appears only at the end of the final book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and not at the opening of Basile's *Pentamerone* in the frame tale, before the collection's storytelling begins. This alerts readers to an emerging relationship between the two collections. Basile amplifies the connection by positioning 'La Mortella' (The Myrtle) as the Number 2 story in Day 1 of the *Pentamerone*, just as Ovid slotted 'Daphne and Apollo' into the *Metamorphoses* as the second tale in Book 1 sixteen centuries earlier.<sup>5</sup> The notable precision of Basile's organising principle suggests that Basile used structure to signal his indebtedness to Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' for his composition of 'The Myrtle'.

This study emphasises the Latin author, Ovid, rather than Apuleius (c.124 – after 170 CE) and his 'Cupid and Psyche' as the book-derived shaping force in one tale, 'The Myrtle', within Basile's composition of the *Pentamerone*.<sup>6</sup> Here I situate Basile's composition of

a single tale within the sphere of the knowledge of the Latin classics that he shared with his initial audience.

The origins of Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' may well lie in the *Erotica Parthemata* (Love Romances) of the first-century BCE Greek-language writer Parthenius (died c. 14 CE), who lived in Rome.<sup>7</sup> Parthenius himself cites an earlier source, the third-century BCE Hellenistic author Phylarchos, all of whose works are now lost and cannot therefore be factually linked to Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo'.

In late 16th- and early 17th-century Italy, Ovid's tale was in the air or, stated more accurately, on booksellers' shelves. Indeed, publishing database searches show that Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and with it the story of 'Daphne and Apollo', was far more available in Italian than in Latin<sup>8</sup> and was thus a ready source for vernacular retellings of its dramatic plot: Apollo, after killing the great serpent Python,<sup>9</sup> offends Cupid by denigrating his arrows. Cupid purposely wounds Apollo with one of his golden arrows, which causes him to fall completely in love with Daphne. As Ovid tells it, Apollo adores her hair, eyes, lips, fingers, hands, arms, and upper arms, and pursues her relentlessly. The wind, Ovid writes, blows up her skirt and he loves what he sees. What he can't see, the text tells us, he imagines.

Daphne, whom Cupid had struck with one of his leaden arrows,<sup>10</sup> rejects Apollo's love and flees his pursuit. He then chases her down, the brutality of his pursuit rendered by the accompanying image of a Gallic hound running down a hare. As Daphne flees Apollo's lust, she begs her father that she may lose the body that lures Apollo<sup>11</sup> and immediately thin bark begins to cover her breasts; her arms become branches; her hair turns into foliage and her feet into roots.

Apollo can now catch her; and when he does, he feels her still-beating heart beneath the bark and kisses her woody skin. At last possessing her, Apollo declares her to be his tree, from which he will craft his lyre and from whose laurel leaves he will crown his own head and the heads of triumphing Roman generals. Ovid concludes the story with Daphne's acceptance of Apollo's shift from physical lust to symbolic reverence.

Just as Basile inverted Egeria's position from its final Book 15 placement in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to his own first position in Book 1 of the *Pentamerone*, he also inverts meaning and reverses plot development as he develops his story of 'The Myrtle' from Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo'.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Basile pushes his inversions and reversals forward so prominently that he seems to be flagging the passages to ensure that his audience understands his method. The textual overttness of his doing so suggests that Basile's 'Myrtle' functions as a playbook for performing the story before an audience<sup>13</sup> that would recognise the underlying Ovidian material and could appreciate Basile's witty variations on Ovid's story. If so, it would not be the only tale in his collection that he prepared in this manner.<sup>14</sup>

As is customary throughout the *Pentamerone*, Basile's telling of 'The Myrtle' opens with discussion of the previous story. The fictive narrator Ceca observes that men should flee a public woman (that is, a prostitute)<sup>15</sup> even more than they flee the sight of a serpent.<sup>16</sup>

We must ask why a careful author like Basile casually throws the word 'serpent' into the otherwise shrub- and tree-based 'Myrtle'. Here, however, we need only recall that Ovid writes the serpent 'Python' into the opening lines of his 'Daphne and Apollo'.<sup>17</sup> Would his initial listeners have recognised this clandestine reference?<sup>18</sup> Probably not, but the reference forms part of the textual record, and we must acknowledge it. Another aspect of Basile alerting his audience to his Ovidian source is even more indirect: instead of writing 'Python' as Ovid did, Basile uses the Neapolitan word 'scorzone' for 'snake', with the likely result that his initial listeners did not comprehend the equivalence between his 'scorzone' and Ovid's 'Python'. Nonetheless, it confirms the presence of a narrative strategy on Basile's part to tease his listeners about the game he is playing, whether they initially recognise it or not.

Next, Basile moves the story along with a venerable folk narrative trope, namely, a long-childless couple. The wife longs so much to give birth that she says she'd be happy to produce a branch of myrtle, the word for which is *mortella* in both Neapolitan and Italian. Why 'myrtle', we ask. In Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo', Daphne turns into a laurel tree at the end, '*te nostre Laure*', as Apollo addresses her.<sup>19</sup> An evergreen tree, the laurel can reach an 18-metre height,<sup>20</sup> whereas the myrtle is an evergreen shrub that grows to a maximum height of five metres. Thus Basile's use of 'myrtle' connotes the small size of the child born to the previously childless couple, while denoting her as 'laurel' announces her physical growth and her increase in metaphorical significance as well as identifying her with Ovid's Daphne-laurel.<sup>21</sup>

For the birth of the little myrtle branch, Basile engages in an elaborate wording. To comprehend the passage, his audience would have had to be familiar with other aspects of classical mythology. As Basile puts it, the Elysian fields of the mother's womb cast out a beautiful myrtle branch. This unexpected image inverts all existing associations with the Elysian Fields, which classic mythology regularly identifies as the final resting place for those who have lived an exemplary life. Thus, a person's having been cast *out* of the Elysian Fields to begin their lives, as Basile describes the little myrtle branch's birth, would be immediately recognised by a classically educated audience as a joke that invites responsive laughter.

As the story continues, the little myrtle branch's mother plants her in a decorated pot and tends her carefully. One day, the local prince,<sup>22</sup> passing by, sees the beautiful myrtle shrub and demands it for himself. He has the plant delivered to the loggia of his bedroom, where he hoes and rakes the soil twice a day.

This hoe-and-rake image inverts the coarsely sexual field-ploughing imagery that is common to every European country from at least the medieval period onward.<sup>23</sup> However, it does so here in the context of an inescapably ludicrous potted plant and miniature tools. As Basile continues this passage, he builds on the sexual metaphor in a way that his audience could not have missed. One night, the prince hears footsteps nearing his bed and soon he feels 'a little something that was more mellow and soft than Tunisian wool, more yielding and pliable than the tail of a marten, more delicate and tender than the

feathers of a goldfinch.<sup>24</sup> The prince flings himself across the bed, and believing that the creature he finds is a fairy, wraps himself around her like an octopus, and they make love.

Basile's next words unite two worlds. One surrounds him and his audience, and with reference to that real context the prince in the story praises his fairy-beloved as more beautiful than the then well-known romance heroine Fiorella.<sup>25</sup> The other world lies in classic antiquity. Because Basile and his initial audiences had been schooled in the classics, they share a common knowledge of references to that distant world; hence the prince's claim that his fairy-beloved surpasses that of the three beauties of the ancient world – Venus, Creusa, and Helen of Troy<sup>26</sup> – in addition to that of Fiorella in contemporaneous popular street literature. The passion is mutual, which Basile expresses grammatically by using the vividly inclusive gerund form, which embraces both participants<sup>27</sup> as fully willing sexual partners.

Basile now returns to inversion, as the following seven-day blissful love play in 'The Myrtle' turns Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' inside out. So, too, does Basile's turning to a book that his listeners also would have known, Apuleius's 'Cupid and Psyche',<sup>28</sup> which from 1500 to 1600 in Italy was published and republished as *Apuleii Metamorpheos*.<sup>29</sup> The following passage in the *Pentameron* is a playful conceptual puzzle: although popularly known as *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius himself titled his book *Metamorphoses*, just as Ovid had done. Did Basile's original listeners recognise the next reversal, one of gender;<sup>30</sup> that Basile builds into the story, as having come not from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* but from Apuleius's *Metamorphose*? If so, Basile burnished his reputation as an inventive literary trickster. In Apuleius's tale, a woman spends many delightful nights in bed with a man she has felt, but hasn't seen, before she is eventually inspired to light a candle and look at him. In 'The Myrtle', Basile switches the gender to a man (the prince) seeking to learn the identity of an unknown female lover. If his listeners did, in fact, catch the gender reversal from Apuleius's *Metamorpheos*, they probably also waited for drops of hot wax,<sup>31</sup> or something similar, to fall, particularly because Basile has his servant bring the prince a candle.<sup>32</sup> Its light shows her to be a superbly beautiful woman:<sup>33</sup> is the absence of sleep-disturbing drops of hot wax an intentional reversal?

At this point, performance reasserts itself as a prominent aspect of Basile's composition of 'The Myrtle', when he introduces the story's first speech that appears to be consciously and purposefully crafted as a comic narrative performance:

“Now go jump in an oven, Cyprian goddess! Wrap a cord around your neck, O Helen! Go back where you came from, O Creusa and Fiorella, for your beauties are rags compared to this double-soled beauty, this complete, integral, seasoned immense, well-built beauty! . . . O sleep; O sweet sleep, unload your poppies into the eyes of this lovely jewel . . .”<sup>34</sup>

With three paragraphs of Baroque exaggeration and extension, the passage, as Basile implies in a self-ironising moment, is too long, even for the prince's fairy beloved: she modestly brings the Prince's prose back to daily realities by citing her willingness to empty his chamber pot as the measure of her love!<sup>35</sup>

Immediately after linking the beautiful fairy to the most humble of household pots, Basile puts her in another pot, when he has her say: 'I consider it a great fortune that from a myrtle branch planted in a clay pot I have been transformed into a laurel bough.'<sup>36</sup> Basile could have pointed directly to Ovid's title *Metamorphoses* here by using the Italian verb *metamorfosare* or its related noun *metamorfosi*. Instead, he appears to toy with the expectations he might have awakened among his listeners because he uses the Neapolitan verbs *pastenare* and *deventare* (Italian *divenire*).<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, the word 'laurel' (*lauro* in both 17th-century Neapolitan and modern Italian) unequivocally links both the fairy and Basile's story with Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo': Basile confirms what by now might have been his audience's expectation for a continuation of Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' within 'The Myrtle'. He had already reversed the chronology of Ovid's tale: whereas Ovid's human heroine became a plant – in fact, a tree – as the story progresses, Basile's heroine began as a plant – a shrub – that took on human shape.

Having led his audience to expect more Ovidian material in the ongoing story, Basile again diverges from that direction when he returns to the well-established medieval and early modern literary trope of extending a story by inserting a narrative impediment to the happiness that the prince and the willing fairy are about to achieve. Using low humour to introduce Ovidian gore, Basile achieves a startling mix of fantastical fairy-tale structure and gory Ovidian content within a thick layer of foreboding Baroque metaphor – 'But since Fortune is ... a black dog that shits on the pleasures of those who love'<sup>38</sup> – Basile suddenly drops the ominous information that the prince must go away for two or three nights, after which the fairy asks him to attach a bell to the topmost branch to announce his eventual return home.

Now Basile tells his audience that the great and virtuous prince<sup>39</sup> has been keeping seven 'women of vice' (*de mala vita*), whose fields the prince has recently ceased tilling.<sup>40</sup> To learn why he has lost interest in them, the women have a tunnel dug from their house to the prince's bedroom. When they finally arrive there and see the beautiful tree in its pot, each breaks off a branch. The youngest of them inadvertently causes the bell to ring, making the fairy think the prince has returned, so that she emerges from the tree in her human form. Nancy Canepa's lively translation communicates the destructive energy in the whores' angry words to the delicate fairy:

as soon as the whorish nags saw that resplendent thing, they laid<sup>41</sup>  
their paws on her, saying, 'You're the one who draws the water of  
our hope to your mill?'<sup>42</sup> You're the one who took from our hands

the lovely scraps of the prince's grace? You're that 'Madame Magnificence' who has taken possession of the tender flesh that belonged to us? May you be welcome! Go on, you're on the draining board now! Oh, better if your mother had never shat you;<sup>43</sup> go on, you're all set! You've taken Vaiano! This time you've really bumped into it! If you get out of this one, then I wasn't born in nine months!"<sup>44</sup>

Few 21st-century readers of 'The Myrtle' have gory Ovidian imagery embedded in their memories, but 17th-century listeners educated according to standard classic curricula carried different imagery in their imaginary. Even if they had only read Ovid's stories in one of the *Metamorphoses*' many Italian imprints, they would have been equipped with an expectation for the bloody violence that follows, as the jealous whores attack the fairy:

they hurled a stick at her head and, immediately broke her into a hundred pieces. Then each of them took her share; only the youngest didn't want to have a hand in this cruel affair, and when she was invited by her sisters to do as they were doing, she wanted nothing more than a lock of that golden hair. When they were done, they cleared out, using the same tunnel.<sup>45</sup>

Relatively little gore accompanies this violence in the *Pentamerone*, because Basile moves the attack's bloodiness into the salvational section that follows, when the prince's servant arrives, sees the disaster, and tries to clean it up: 'He picks up the bits of the flesh and bones that remained, and when he had scraped the blood off the floor, he piled everything back into the pot, and watered it.'<sup>46</sup>

Shortly afterward the prince appears and the fairy regenerates as her pre-tree fairy self, another reversal of Ovidian transformations from human to inanimate object. The Basile text is explicit:

When the fairy, who had begun to sprout anew from the remains placed in the pot, saw how her poor lover was tearing out his hair and throwing himself around, and how he had become a little pinch of a thing the color of a sick Spaniard, a wormy lizard, cabbage juice, jaundice, the ass of a fig pecker, and a wolf's fart, she was moved to compassion and [sprang] out of a pot [just the way] the light of a candle comes out of a blind lantern. She materialized before Cola Marchione [the prince] and, squeezing him in her arms,

said, come on, cheer up, my prince, no more, no more! End that lament, dry those eyes, leave your anger behind, relax that long face! Here I am, alive and beautiful, in spite of those old birds, who, after they broke my head open, did to my flesh what Typhon did to his poor brother!<sup>47</sup>

'The Myrtle' has a happy ending. The virtuous prince revives from his misery at the sight and by the words of the beautiful fairy, gets his father's permission to marry, does so, and orders a sumptuous celebratory banquet. Afterward the guests pass judgment on the seven wicked women, who condemn themselves to be buried alive in a city sewer. In a broad conciliatory conclusion, the youngest of the seven whores is rewarded for her lower level of evil by being given a dowry and being married to the prince's servant, while the fairy's poor parents receive 'enough to live on comfortably'.<sup>48</sup>

The final sentence of Basile's 'Myrtle' contrasts the prince's happy life with the fairy to the 'torment' of the 'daughters of hell'. It also inverts the literary game of telling a story that exemplifies a proverb, by absurdly claiming that the story proves 'the truth of that proverb of the ancient sages: *The lame goat gets by if it finds none who block it*'.<sup>49</sup>

For decades Basile's tales were imitated and reworked in Italian and in French, most influentially by Charles Perrault (1628-1703) and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1652-1705), whose reworkings were later adopted, adapted and further developed in other languages. However, when Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's essay 'Der *Pentamerone* des Basile' emphasised Basile's links to oral tradition and made no mention either of the *Pentamerone*'s many stories' close ties to Latin antiquity or modern printing presses,<sup>50</sup> they set the direction for *Pentamerone* research in the 19th and 20th centuries.

### **Pentamerone Scholarship and Its Contemporary Influence**

Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), translating Basile's tales from Neapolitan into modern Italian as *Racconto degli Raconti* (1925), explicated Basile's linguistic usage and historical references but took little note of literature from antiquity in the collection as a whole and none at all in 'The Myrtle'. When N.M. Penzer (1892-1960) translated Croce's modern Italian into English in 1932, he incorporated Croce's commentary into his annotations, with the same emphasis on oral tradition. The emphasis on oral tradition continued in late 20th-century scholarship, such as Michele Rak's well-annotated Neapolitan-Italian edition of *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1987), whose notes on 'La Mortella' include none of the classical references documented and cited in this article. The tendency persisted in the 1997 essays gathered in *Out of the Woods: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France* (ed. Nancy Canepa) and in Canepa's influential 1999 monograph, *From Court to Forest: Giambattista Basile's Lo cunto de li cunti and the Birth of the Literary Fairy Tale*, which foregrounds oral transmission.

Rudolf Schenda's 2000 essay, 'Basiles *Pentamerone*: Mediterrane Lebenswirklichkeit und Europäische Literaturtraditionen'<sup>51</sup> ('Basile's *Pentamerone*: The Reality of Mediterranean Daily Life and the European Literary Tradition') touches on Greek mythological references in the *Pentamerone* (485) and names the Greek-language Plutarch (45-125 CE)<sup>52</sup> but ignores the Latin-language *Metamorphoses* of Ovid<sup>53</sup> and speaks little of Apuleius. Encyclopaedia articles confirm this view.<sup>54</sup>

Between 2014 and 2018 three remarkably convergent scholarly contributions set a new direction in studying relationships between Latin literature of antiquity and modern European fairy tales. Stijn Praet published a dissertation, 'Fairy Tales & Latin Tradition that uses a "Literary-Contextualising Approach"' (the dissertation's subtitle), in Chapter 2 of which the author, with compelling reasoning, names Apuleius's 'Cupid and Psyche' as a singular instance of a Latin 'fairy tale'.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, his analysis of both antique and medieval Latin texts demonstrates *textual* rather than oral relationships.

In 2015 Armando Maggi's *Preserving the Spell* posited Apuleius's 'Cupid and Psyche' as the book-based textual underlay for several Basile tales, including 'The Myrtle'.<sup>56</sup> Maggi finds evidence for Basile's *textual* sourcing from Apuleius in his discovery of Basilean reversals of motifs and episodes in the Latin 'Cupid and Psyche'. Maggi subsequently alludes to a possible connection between 'The Myrtle' and Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' as an 'overlapping of two myths'.<sup>57</sup> Within the thesis that 'Cupid and Psyche' dominates the paradigm for Basile's love stories,<sup>58</sup> Maggi concludes that "'The Myrtle" starts where the Apollo and Daphne myth ends, and then goes backward to the beginning of the myth, where Daphne was still the beautiful young daughter of a river-god'.<sup>59</sup> Defining 'The Myrtle' as 'the backward unfolding' of 'Cupid and Psyche'<sup>60</sup> is correct within the context of Maggi's 21st-century argument, which, as he writes, 'depends on how we look at it',<sup>61</sup> where 'it' refers to Basile's text of 'The Myrtle'.

In a 2018 article "'Se lieie la favola': Apuleian Play in Basile's *Lo Cunto*", Praet similarly relates Apuleius's 'Cupid and Psyche' to two Basile tales, 'Lo catennacio' ('The Padlock', Day 2, Story 9) and 'Lo turzo d'oro' ('The Golden Trunk', Day 5, Story 4) and, in an aside, observes that Basile 'was counting on his educated audiences in the Neapolitan courts and academics to pick up on this and to factor it into their reading/listening experience' and suggests further research into other Basile tales for 'paraphrastic reminiscences of the [Apuleian] *Metamorphoses*, 'starting with the prince's discovery of the sleeping fairy in "La mortella"'.<sup>62</sup>

These three publications' sequential appearance suggests that Maggi and Praet drew on each other's research, but in fact that only happened well into their independent research. For my part, I had read Praet's dissertation, but just when Maggi's book came out, an onset of vision problems kept me from reading it. When eight years later I returned to Basile for the 2023 Chichester conference, 'Basile: The Other Fairy

Godfather', I concentrated on the Basile text, reserving catching up with secondary literature for preparing the paper for publication. And so just as Maggi had not been able to use Praet's dissertation (because of timing), and Praet had not known of Maggi's book as he researched his Apuleius article, I had missed Praet's 2018 article and not read Maggi's book until after the 2023 conference. The convergence in focus is interesting; the differing conclusions are significant.

Reading Maggi's 2015 book and Praet's 2018 article "'Se lieie la favola': Apuleian Play in Basile's *Lo Cunto*" in the process of editing the conference talk for publication made it clear that Praet, Maggi, and I had begun from three fundamentally differing starting points – Latin literature of antiquity, Apuleius as foundational in Basile's imaginary, and Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' as integral to Basile's composition of 'The Myrtle'. Although Maggi had not known of Praet's dissertation, and Praet learned of Maggi's book only after he'd completed his 2018 article, both had principally investigated Apuleius's influence on Basile, one within a framework of oral transmission and the other as an instance of intertextuality. Both mention possible Ovidian influence. My work centres on a single Basile story and uses its published text to ask how and why Basile chose its words and phrases. In the end, this article modifies earlier conclusions: it documents textual reversals and inversions in the text of 'The Myrtle' that apply extensively to Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo'. This confirms both Maggi's 2015 and Praet's 2018 speculative interest in Ovid's contribution to 'The Myrtle'. Do any other tales in Basile's *Pentamerone* contain a similar Ovidian underlay? I leave that question for others to answer. In the meantime, oral- and text-based research continues, as indicated by Cristina Mazzoni's 'The Fruit of Love in Giambattista Basile's "The Three Citrons"'<sup>63</sup> and Šárka Hurbánková's 'G.B. Basile and Apuleius: First Literary Tales. Morphological Analysis of Three Fairytales'.<sup>64</sup>

This close examination of the text of 'The Myrtle' shows that Basile played his own game with quondam audiences and still plays it with current readers and researchers. On the one hand, he teases them with allusions to a shared knowledge of Ovid's 'Daphne and Apollo' and includes the comic development of entire episodes from canonical texts of Latin antiquity while, on the other hand, he replaces Ovid's elevated rhetoric with language from Neapolitan streets and open-air performances. Basile's method is an old but continuing comic device that lards a Roman classic with the crudities of demotic speech. It's still done by comedians high and low, on stages, in films, and during British holiday pantomimes.

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**Ruth B. Bottigheimer**

## Notes

1. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Mary M. Innes (New York: Penguin, 1955), 29.
2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 40.
3. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 41-4.
4. Contemporary commentators nearly always identify Egeria, as does Michele Rak in Giambattista de Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, ed. and trans. Michele Rak (Milan: Garzanti, 1985), 29n14. However, Rak does not mention Ovid in his notes to 'La Mortella' / 'The Myrtle' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 70-3), instead citing Plutarch for the serpent reference and Euripedes for Medea in notes 28 and 29 (73).
5. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 'Daphne and Apollo' is the second story of metamorphosis in Book I (of 15) after 'Deucalion and Pyrrha', while in the *Pentamerone*, 'The Myrtle' is the second story on the first day (of five days of storytelling).
6. Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche' has long informed *Pentamerone* research but has taken a new direction since 2014, as discussed at the end of this article.
7. Parthenius's version is accessible in vol. 69 of the Loeb Classical Library edition: Parthenius, *Longus, Daphnis and Chloe: Parthenius, Love Romances*, trans. J.M. Edmonds, and S. Gaselee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).
8. According to WCAT Search, Italian titled imprints of Ovid's *Metamorphosi* between 1500 and 1600 were all produced in Venice. So, too, was the single imprint in Latin by Aldus Manutius, which was titled *Metamorphoeo*.
9. Python appears in 'Daphne and Apollo' both by name (Python) as well as by its animal form (*serpens*):  
'Illa quidem nollet, sed te quoque, maxime Python,  
tum genuit, populisque novis incognita serpens  
terror eras; tantum spatii de monte tenebas'  
in *Metamorphoses*, Book I, ll. 438-40,  
[https://www.classics.uga.edu/sites/default/files/guanci\\_Final%20Draft%20Teaching%20Project\\_0.pdf](https://www.classics.uga.edu/sites/default/files/guanci_Final%20Draft%20Teaching%20Project_0.pdf)  
(accessed 30 May 2023). Python is a female monster; not primordial like Typhon and – as Ovid writes – one of the 'new monsters' ('nova monstra', Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I, l. 437).
10. Cupid's gold-tipped arrows made people fall in love with one another; while a wound from one of his lead-tipped arrows caused revulsion.
11. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I, ll. 546-7.
12. Both Stijn Praet ('"Se lieie la favola": Apuleian Play in Basile's *Lo Cunto*', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* no.25 (2018):315-32, 326) and Armando Maggi (*Preserving the Spell: Basile's The Tale of Tales and Its Afterlife in the Fairy Tale Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 120) refer to potentially paraphrastic elements linking 'The Myrtle' to 'Cupid and Psyche', but neither considers the story's structural relationship to 'Daphne and Apollo' that I introduce here as a new element in the discussion.
13. Rak sees Basile's performative style as utilising 'rituali della conversazione e dell'intrattenimento' (customary usage in conversation and entertainment), Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, lviii), which allows for the kind of story delivery I propose in this article.
14. Armando Maggi identifies large numbers of 'Cupid and Psyche' plot reversals in Basile tales, including 'The Myrtle': see below.
15. Giambattista Basile, *Giambattista Basile's Tale of the Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*, trans. and ed. Nancy Canepa (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 52; Neapolitan: 'le mardette femmene' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 52); Italian: 'una donna disonesta' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 53).
16. Neapolitan: 'no scorzone'; Italian: 'un serpent' (*ibid.*).
17. 'Ovid *Metamorphoses* I 438-451', No Dictionaries website,  
<https://nodictionaries.com/ovid/metamorphoses-1/438-451> (accessed 23 March 2024).
18. Some of the pleasure of scholarship lies in happening upon shared perceptions in fellow researchers' writing. Note here Praet's aside about Basile's 'counting on his educated audiences in the Neapolitan courts and academies to pick up on [his creative rewriting] and to factor it into their reading/listening experience' (Praet, 'Apuleian Play in Basile's *Lo Cunto*', 319).

19. '[Y]ou, our laurel'. Mary Innes translates this phrase as 'you will at least be my tree' in the Penguin edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (44). While the shift from myrtle to laurel can be understood as a metaphor for Daphne's increase in mythic stature when she advances to the iconic status of artistic or military triumph, I view the transformation as narratively necessary: the woodiness of a myrtle shrub is far too slight to build the lyre that Apollo proposes constructing from her/its body. 'Daphne and Apollo', in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated from Latin by Wikisource, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Metamorphoses/Daphne\\_and\\_Apollo](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Metamorphoses/Daphne_and_Apollo), l. 559 (accessed 23 March 2024).
20. In botanical terms, the plants belong to the *Myrtus* and *Laurus* genera, although Basile and his pre-Linnaean contemporaries would not have known this.
21. Basile's titling the tale 'La Mortella' (that is, 'The Myrtle') seems to have caused commentators to overlook her subsequent laurel identity, as does the commentary on this story in Giambattista Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen: Das Pentamerone*. trans. Hanno Helbling, Rudolf Schenda, Luisa Rubini, Alfred Messerli, Doris Senn, Johann Pögl, and Dieter Richter (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 575-6, while the notes on the same story cite Plutarch with reference to Tiphon (519n14) rather than Ovid, just as Euripides is cited rather than Ovid with reference to Medea (519n15).
22. A name later mentioned in a dramatic address by the prince is Cola Marchione, the name of the story's royal hero (Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 58n30).
23. *Ibid.*, n36.
24. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 53-4, also 54n7.
25. N.M. Penzer (ed. and trans.), *The Pentamerone of Giambattista Basile*, 2 vols (Westport CT USA: Greenwood Press, 1932; 1979), vol. I, 27n5. See also Schenda in Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen*, 519n7.
26. At the same time Basile also adds Celtic *matière de Bretagne* with a reference to the Fata Morgana (Penzer, *Pentamerone*, 57). Note that Venus is one of several beauties Basile lists, an observation that weakens the argument that Basile's mention of Venus here invokes an association with Venus in the plot of 'Cupid and Psyche'.
27. Neapolitan: '[I]oquanno a la passata muta, facettero a preta 'n sino' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 56); Italian: 'facendo passerotto, passerotto giocarono a dove hai messo la pietruzza' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 57).
28. Armando Maggi also places 'Cupid and Psyche' at the centre of his analysis of several Basile stories, including 'The Myrtle'. See Part I, Chapter 1 and Part II, Chapter 4 of Maggi, *Preserving the Spell*.
29. Listings for Italian-language printings of Apuleius's book in Italy between 1500 and 1625 use the spelling given here. For a far more detailed history of Apuleius and 'Cupid and Psyche', see Praet, 'Apuleian Play in Basile's *Lo Cunto*', 322-5.
30. Basile builds another possible gender reversal into the wording of the story at about this point, by writing that the prince, a male, is 'pregnant with curiosity' (Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 54). The original Neapolitan, 'prienno de curiosità', and Italian, 'gravido di curiosità' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 56, 57), humorously suggest male pregnancy.
31. Apuleius's heroine Psyche lights a candle to see her lover; but hot drops of wax awaken Cupid, who then leaves her.
32. The prince first ties one of her braids to his arm.
33. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 54; Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 56, 57.
34. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 54. In a note on the German translation, Schenda et al. understand a similar but later passage in 'The Myrtle' (Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 58) as a parody of performances by comedians in Neapolitan street theatre (Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen*, 519n13). I thank Sabine Wiener-Piepho for bringing this note to my attention.
35. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 54; Neapolitan: 'lo necessario' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 58); Italian: 'il vaso da notte' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 59). Schenda et al. note that Basile also used this image in *Le Muse napoletane* (Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen*, 519n11), which was published in the following year, 1635.
36. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 55-6.

37. '[E] stimo a gran fortuna che da ramo de mortella **pastenato** a na testa de creta sia diventato frascone de lauro impizzato al'ostaria de no core de carne e de no core dove è tanta grandezza e tanta vertute' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 58) / '[E] stimo una gran fortuna che da ramo di mortella piantato in un vaso di coccio sia **diventata** una fronda di lauro attaccata sill'osteria di un cuore di carne e di un cuore dove è tanta grandezza e tanta virtù' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 59).
38. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 56.
39. The fairy herself has just declared him to have 'a heart of such greatness and such virtue' (*ibid.*).
40. '[H]e had given up working their fields' (Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 57); Neapolitan: 'aveva 'nzoperato de lavorare a li terretorie loro' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 60); Italian: 'aveva smesso di lavorare i loro campi' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 61). Basile specifies the coming action sexually by the prince giving his servant detailed instructions about maintaining his bed in apparent readiness on each of the nights on which he is to be absent (*ibid.*). Note that such detailed instructions are a regular feature of early restoration fairy tales.
41. In a typo, the published word here is 'lay' (57).
42. A mill's grinding was another regular metaphor for sexual intercourse.
43. An infelicitous shift from a vaginal to an anal birthing.
44. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 57.
45. Neapolitan: 'le schiaffattaro na saggioccola 'n capo e, spartennola subeto 'nciento piezze, ogn'unase ne pigliaie la parte soia; sulo la quiù peccerella no voze concorrere a sta crudeleata cosa: e, 'mmitata da le sore a fare comme facevano lloro, no voze autro che no cierno de chille capille d'oro. Fatto chesto, se l'appalorciaro pe le medesema cava' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 62); Italian: 'le schiaffarano un bastone in testa e, sbranandola subito in in cento pezzi, ognunase ne presse la parte sua; soltanto la più piccolo non volle metter mano in questa faccenda crudele e, invitata dale sorelle a fare come facevano loro, non volle altro che una ciocca di quei capelli d'oro. Fatto questo, se la squagliarono attraverso la stessa galleria' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 63).
46. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 57; Neapolitan: 'lo cammariero ... auziaie li residie de la carne e de l'ossa avanzate e, raso lo sango da terra, ne fece tuttono montonciello dintro la stessa teseta; la quale adacquata' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 62) / Italian: 'il cameriere ... raccolse i resti della carne e delle ossa avanzate e, raschiato il sangue da terra, ne fece tutto un mucchietto dentro lo stesso vaso; l'annaffiò' (Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 63).

With this instance of gender reversal, we have a truncated scene straight from Straparola's 'Livoretto and Bellisandra' (Night 3, Story 2), where Princess Bellisandra cuts off Livoretto's head. For cutting the head off the torso, the editor, Pirovano, reminds readers of a prior such image in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Day 4, Story 5) (Giovan Francesesco Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*, ed. Donato Pirovano, 2 vols (Rome: Salerno, 1551/3, 2000), 195n5), who mixes Prince Livoretto's minced flesh and broken bones with the water of life, and moulds him into an even more handsome form. The Livoretto text reads as follows in Pirovano's critical text: 'Ma la perfida e sclerata donna, perseverando nel suo mal volere, prese un coltello ignudo e con intrepido e viril anom o in presenza del soldano il giovane ferì nella gola, e non essendovi alcuno che avesse ardire di prestargli aiuto, in terra morto caddé. Non contenta di questo la malvaggia damigella gli spiccò il capo del busto, e minuzzate le sue carni e frattì li nervi e note le dure ossa e fatte come minuta polvere, prese una conco de ramo [here Pirovano cites Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for this word, without specifying 'Daphne and Apollo' (196n7). RBB] non picciola e a poco a poco dentro vi gittò la tritta [Here Pirovano cites Luigi Pulci, *Morgante e lettere*, ed. D. de Robertis (Florence: Sansoni, 1481; 1984). 44: 'trita lor le carni, i nervi e l'ossa' (196n1), which suggests that Basile may have drawn on Morgante for his imagery. RBB] e minuzzata carne, componendola insieme con l'oss e nervi, non altrimenti che solgiono fare le donne un pastone di fermentata pasta. Impastata che fu la minuzzata carne e ben unitacon le trite ossa e nervi, la donna fece una imagine molto superba e quella con alpolla dell'acqua della vita spruzzò, e incontanente il giovane da morte a vitatuscicato, più bello e più leggiadro che che prima divenne' (Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*, vol. I: 195-6).

- Basile stops short of the miraculous transformation that Straparola's heroine achieves. But the result is identical: in both the Straparolean and the Basilean story, the hacked-up fairy consort in Basile's 'The Myrtle' and the minced-up Livoretto in Straparola's tale each re-emerge as their former self.
47. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 58-9; Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 64, 66, 65, 67. Rak attributes the Typhon reference to Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* XIII (cited by Rak in Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, trans. Rak, 73n28 and by Penzer (ed. and trans.) in *The Pentamerone*, 31n6), who names Book XII [sic]. See also Schenda in Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen*, 519n14. Note that Plutarch (45-125 CE) lived after Ovid, and cannot therefore be Ovid's source, although as a Roman classic, his writings would have been known to the classically educated Basile. More to the point, however, are the many references to Typhon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which remain unexplored in existing scholarship.
  48. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 58.
  49. Basile, *Tale of the Tales*, trans. Canepa, 60.
  50. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. 3, ed. Heinz Rölleke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1856-7, 1980), vol. 3, 290-4.
  51. Schenda in Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen*, 477-511.
  52. Schenda in Basile, *Das Märchen der Märchen*, 485 and with reference to Isis and Osiris in relation to Basile's mention of Typhon (*ibid.*, 2000, 519n14).
  53. Schenda mentions Ovid's *Fasti* with reference to Venus as a beauty, but in a context that does not impinge on 'The Myrtle'.
  54. Schenda, 'Basile', *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* I (1977), cols. 1296-308; Alan Soons, 'Myrte (AaTh 652A)', *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (1999) 9, cols. 1064-6.
  55. Praet, "'Se lieie la favola': Apuleian Play in Basile's *Lo Cunto*", 319, 326.
  56. See especially Chapters 1 and 4.
  57. Maggi, *Preserving the Spell*, 120.
  58. Maggi's Apuleius-paradigm allows for a glancing reference to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the mention of Ovid's *Fasti* about Venus and the myrtle as a plant (117-19).
  59. Maggi, *Preserving the Spell*, 120.
  60. *Ibid.*
  61. Maggi, *Preserving the Spell*, 118.
  62. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 25:315-32, here 319, 326.
  63. Cristina Mazzoni, 'The Fruit of Love in Giambattista Basile's "The Three Citrons"', *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2015), 228-44.
  64. Šárka Hurbánková, 'G.B. Basile and Apuleius: first literary tales: morphological analysis of three fairytales', *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* (2018), vol. 23, iss. 2, 75-93.

Hansel and Gretel, lithograph  
(Wellcome Collection 27386i).



# Hansel and Gretel Retold

Kristin Camitta Zimet

## I. Hansel

The first time, I dropped my hard remarks  
like pocket stones – just far enough apart  
I still could sneak back to the door and find it  
off the latch; though I'd as soon have tipped  
the mountaintop, crushing the cottage  
like a mouldy loaf, both of them in it:  
my father; stiff and stale; that woman,  
slick as flour; tear-salty, floundering in sugar.  
Women – they want to squeeze you into shape,  
poke and decorate you. Even my dough-faced  
sister will swell up into a woman – ugh!  
Witches, the lot of them, keeping you cooped  
and coddled, then sidling up familiar as cats,  
the merest rub making you smother-hot,  
your body steaming like unseasoned wood,  
your hands all blunder. No trusting in them.  
Dream – and they flutter pecking at your hand.  
Wake reaching – they dissolve, crumbs  
on a dirt floor. Or die. Nights I lie awake,  
a spring of bitter cold seeps out of me  
into a white lake numbing my heart,  
my tongue. Next time she tries to touch  
even my little finger; not one word. Only  
I'll hiss like red iron in the blacksmith's  
bucket. Then axe-hard, I'll clear out.

## II. Gretel

I'm getting used to hunger.  
Getting light as the white bird  
who flits at the edge of my dreams,  
a wisp of milky fog between trees.  
Like icing your tongue just misses  
at the corner of your mouth.  
It's easier, now Papa brushes me  
off his lap like stale crumbs.  
If Hans tosses a sugared word,  
he's just teasing a squirrel  
into slingshot range.  
My Mama's faded calico –  
almost my size – lumbers  
around the house, split by that  
big woman, bosom overstuffed  
like dough so long rising, it crusts  
and sags over the bowl's edge.  
When she looms over me,  
ladling stew, I hear it seethe,  
her flesh, creeping out like yeast.

It smothers appetite. I have to eat  
because of Papa's fist; I've had to  
swallow everything since Mama  
lay down, a white stone. I just  
undo it out-of-doors. Though once  
juicy afternoons ran down my chin.  
I tottered home, heavy. She was there,  
a steamy kettle on the hob for us,  
and cream in heart's-ease tea.  
Now my basket floats. I flutter  
on the path, toes barely touching  
down. I bring back blueberries  
shrivelled up, gooseberries  
prickly-sour, false strawberries,  
gritty with dust. The white bird  
promises, soon I'll blow away,  
shiny milkweed on my Mama's breath.

### III. The Woodcutter

"It's not for the cut wood to cry out,"  
the old priest scolded, when I dragged  
myself to him, my soul smashed to kindling.  
"He strides the woods; He sets His axe  
to any trunk. Praise Him, and do not dare  
hold back His hand." (I saw Him then,  
whose roaring appetite gobbles us up  
just as the manor squanders wood –  
my own green boy, my stick-tight girl  
good as gone; and any baby I might  
ever make would come out bawling  
and red-hot, because it saw Him too ...)

"But Father, you know my wife was  
just a sapling beech; when she swayed,  
sunlight shook down from the canopy,  
sweetening shade. Children grew  
around her; green and full.  
So slight a tree to leave so deep a gap.  
He might have spared ..."

The old priest flashed a chipped tooth.  
"He's only made a clearing. Praise Him,  
son, the woods are full of women.  
Find you one, I'll wager you will sprout  
as stout as ever. There's one, now,  
the baker's big girl, blubbers for you –  
she's a spicy one – I'll fix it up."

(I felt Him, lopping, then,  
whacking off branches that I might  
grow back, grow thick with longing,  
time and again, more spindly, more  
readily bent. Saw how He makes us,  
so half-hewn, the heart goes on  
labouring stubborn at the chopping block  
till there is nothing more that He  
can take. Saw every path in Eden  
pushing us toward the Tree, the trap  
baited with sweet, and sprung.)

I snapped her up, the baker's girl:  
His will be done. I chop the days,  
haul them away to sell, to burn.  
I hear His axe, shadowing,  
blow for blow. He's coming  
back. But praise Him for it?  
Sooner I'll be damned.

## IV. The Stepmother

For all his greenwood looks, the breezy sway  
of oaken limbs that always turned my head,  
let it be told: that he was lightning-struck,  
charred top to bottom, once she died.  
That his hands hung limp after a day's chopping.  
That he sat stump-still at a cold hearth,  
memories sprouting like fungus, eating him soft,  
crawling like beetles up under the bark.

And the children, wood-sprites – tell it right –  
grew brambly: he a dark wolf; she a white mouse  
scuttling into the brush, tied to his shadow.  
If I would pour them milk, they'd drop the jug.  
If I would bake, they'd roll the crumbled loaves  
into white pebbles on their plates.  
Suppertime, the sawdust air could choke.  
I spun them sugar, once:  
they snatched, dropped it smack down again.  
It burnt their skinny fingers, don't you know,  
to take from me, wrapped in her patched-up gown.

She was a witch, you see, a thorny vine  
up from the grave to strangle all my chances.  
But send them off, sudden I'd feel the sun  
pouring down honey on the thatch.  
I'd reel, as if – my senses tangled up  
in trees for years, gloom of trees, groan of trees –  
I'd stumbled on a clearing.  
So when the gypsy peddler came, what if he was  
knotted, a gnome? Let the tale-bearers say:  
spicy as gingerbread, his manhood rose for me;  
his currant eyes shone hot.  
He crooked his arms of cinnamon, and rolled me up  
easy into his pack.

No matter if you said all of that wood  
blossomed with sticky children, gumdrop-sweet,  
and all the boughs were looped with pearls and gold.  
I am not going back.

.....

**Kristin Camitta Zimet**

'Corvus corone L. Krähen-Rabe ... Corvus cornix L. Nebel-Rabe', Johann Andreas Naumann, illustration from *Naturgeschichte der Vogel Mitteleuropas*, newly edited by G. Berg [et al.], ed. Carl R. Hennicke, vol. 9 (Germany: F.E. Kohler, 1897).



# The Hooded Crow Revived, As Told By The Magpie

Daniel A. Rabuzzi

Ropes so strong, they pull the horse

Oh sweet cousin, I saw it all

Hei fara. Faltu riltu raltura

My sisters, we flew and we gathered, hah

a cark and a clip and a gulp of us

A conventicle, hah, fast and sly and bold,  
under the nose and the eyes and the ears of that man,  
overweening little dirt bishop, the puffed up he of him

Just scolds to him, hah, a flock of margarets and maries,  
Poor fool, scalds we are, our tails dipped in the ink  
of wisdom, our wings  
borne on the internal airs of the mound,  
the hollow,  
the long lees held by Hugin

First I prised back your eyes, hah, made into windows for his  
best farmhouse hall,  
You can see us now, cousin,  
blink and awake, blink and awake again

Then your bill, hah, retrieved from the church harbour,  
a narrow boat no more, free instead to make your own point

Next your claws, hah, buried upright in the hill of dung,  
no more posting for the chanticleer, free instead to mark your own path

Swooping, skating, over his rooftops, down his chimney  
watched over by Munin, with wingbeats of passion and cunning

Lastly your tongue, hah, retrieved from his larder,  
no longer salted for his yuletide feast, free instead to speak your own mind

Quick now, cousin, away we must fly  
Before the bullets pursue us from the farmer's gun

Wings so fast, hah, they race the sun

Oh sweet cousin, I fly with you

Hei fara. Faltu riltu raltura

.....

## Daniel A. Rabuzzi

### Note on the text

Very loosely based on the traditional Norwegian folksong 'Kråkevisa' ('The Song of the Crow', TSB F 58 in *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad: A Descriptive Catalogue*), in which a male farmer kills a giant female crow in the woods, and uses every part of the bird for useful and decorative items, e.g., her guts became rope, her claws became dung forks, her fat a 13-pound candle, and so on. The crow in question is the hooded or grey crow, common throughout Scandinavia (also Scotland, Ireland, and eastern Europe), a species distinct from the carrion crow of Western Europe and the crow species found in North America. A corvid cousin, the magpie in this poem is the Eurasian species; scientists debate how distinct this species is from the two species found in western North America (confirming for me the trickster nature of corvids generally, and suggesting that they may indeed be emissaries from other realms).



Herbert Draper,  
'The Lament for  
Icarus' (1898).



# Daedalus Waiting

Fija Callaghan

He spends his mornings wandering  
through charity shops  
and antique markets  
with tables that extend for miles.  
Gathers watches, old clocks,  
doors with elaborate locks and hinges,  
kitchen appliances, children's toys:  
anything with moving parts.

Even after all these years  
he can feel the hum in his hands. Each cog  
and interconnected link  
a world of potential.

In his workshop, he undresses  
each device, strips them into  
disassembled parts. Many are flotsam,  
developed too late or too hurriedly.  
Plastic, he has learned,  
does not carry life as well  
as metal, wood, or wax.

Some bits he discards. Others  
he carefully sorts and fits  
layer upon layer atop a metal frame,  
the kind they use in tailoring shops.  
A face takes shape: chest, arms,  
hands of typewriter keys.  
There is no spark within these eyes,  
not yet. One piece still is missing.

A music box, perhaps,  
the golden gullet of a gramophone.  
A heavy organ pipe  
unearthed in an estate sale.  
Something resonant  
to give his marvel voice,  
so he might wake and say  
*Father, did you see how high I flew?*  
*There is so much world to see.*  
*Where shall we go next?*

.....

Fija Callaghan

Alice Alinari, 'Underwater Tenderness' (2019, Unsplash).



# Womanskin

Fija Callaghan

In the first enclosure  
are girls who like the damp.  
Some of them wear sealskin;  
some are dressed in scales that glow  
in iridescent colours.

Most of them are not unused  
to the roving hands of sailors.  
Before, they could escape by diving  
deeper than a net could reach,  
but here there are only walls  
and gentle whispers by the hour.

In this room adjoining  
are women who once felt  
the untamed thrill of storm clouds,  
the soft caress of raindrops,  
who knew each current of the wind  
like the pulse of their own breath.

This one wears swanskin  
stitched without seam nor needlework,  
stitched out of nettle thread  
and aching days of silence.

Here there are those beastly brides  
whose coats are dappled like October,  
who close their eyes in quiet hours  
and breathe the scent of dirt and moss  
and blood, remember running  
in reckless abandon  
for the sheer joy of living.

These ones should have known better,  
should have been more careful,  
should have recognised the scent of man.

Most of them are not unkind,  
these well-dressed men  
with unconventional desires.  
Some whisper words of comfort,  
words of solace  
words of love  
as they explore these unfamiliar shapes  
that are woman and not-woman,  
that are dreams given form and flesh.  
On occasion, promises are made;  
but the women have long learned  
that such fragile things  
cannot withstand the morning light.

After all the men have gone,  
the balance paid, the lights turned low,  
they lie together side by side  
and keep each other warm.

.....

Fija Callaghan

John Collier, 'Lady Godiva' (1898, National Gallery of Art).



# Lady Godiva

Susan Francino

**(Coventry, England, c.1000 AD)**

**T**he countess Godiva, who was a great lover of God's mother, longing to free the town of Coventry from the oppression of a heavy toll, often with urgent prayers besought her husband . . . [and] he at last made her this answer, "Mount your horse, and ride naked, before all the people, through the market of the town, from one end to the other, and on your return you shall have your request."

Rodger of Wendover, *Flowers of History*<sup>1</sup>

Godgivuh's neck ached. It had been aching all morning. She walked into the hall, still drowsy though it was almost noon, and found her husband lounging at the banquet table with his feet up on a bench.

"You summoned me, my lord?"

A smile played on Leofric's red-bearded face. "What are you willing to give," he said, "to lift the tax?"

She stared at him for a moment, cautious. He had never before spoken about the tax with a smile on his face.

"Anything, my lord," she said honestly. "Anything but my soul."

"Very well." He held out his hand. "Give me the rings you wear in your ears."

Godgivuh frowned. They were real pearls, but not valuable enough to pay the price of all her people's taxes. Not enough to sate avarice himself. They would hardly warm the dragon's belly.

She handed them over.

"Sit, my lady," he said, and she did.

He knelt before her, reverently it seemed, but she detected amusement in his face. "May I have my lady's fine slippers?"

"Yes . . ." She let him remove the shoes from her feet. Then he took her stockings, too, and threw them in a pile on the floor with the earrings. He kissed one of her ankles gently and stood. She sat frozen in the chair, sensing a trap.

"Now," he said, definitely smirking, "I require my lady's gown."

She stared at him, then glanced at the servant standing at the end of the hall, then looked back at him.

"Leave us," he commanded. "And shut the door." The servant bowed and left with the crisp boom of the door closing.

"Your gown," Leofric repeated, and there was no love, not even desire, in his eyes. Godgivuh's voice had a hysterical edge to it when she spoke. "Are you going to turn me out of doors? Are you going to disown me? It's not lawful. I've done nothing –"

"Shh." He pulled her out of the chair and put a gentle finger on her lips. "Never." She was far from comforted. "Then why –"

"I am setting forth terms. Do you want to hear them or not?"

"My lord," she said evenly. "I can hear terms with my gown on."

"Not these terms. Do you want to hear them?"

She felt queasy under his gaze now, but she nodded. After years of fighting over the tax, this was the first time he had brought it up on his own.

"Then, your gown." He clapped twice and held out his hands. His expression was courtly, but – now she could see it – far back in his cold grey eyes, there was cruel laughter.

She stood frozen. "I – I need –"

"What?" he said, with a hint of impatience.

"I can't take it off without a maid." It was a heavy dress, with sleeves that needed to be sewn on and a bodice that hugged her waist tightly. But she could not bear for her women to see this. It was not herself she did not want them to see, but her husband.

"Then I will be your maid," he said, and with a dagger from his belt, he carefully cut the stitches that held together the gold and red brocade. He threw the dress unceremoniously on the pile with her other things.

"Your shift," he said next, and now he grinned.

"My lord wishes to make a fool of me." Fear and fury battled inside her.

"You would make a fool of me. If that is your desire, you must trade fool for fool, and make a fool of us both. Now give me your shift."

With a shudder, she pulled it off over her head and gave it to him. It seemed more cumbersome than usual to fit it around her tightly coiled hair. But she usually had a maid.

"Your smallclothes," he said coolly. Now there was cruelty in his eyes.

She did not move.

"If you want to free your people from the tax," he said smugly, "you must do as I say."

She tried not to cry as she took them off, but the tears came anyway. She resisted the urge to cover herself, and stood tall, as dignified as she could be, though tears ran all the way down her cheeks and splashed against her bare breasts.

Her husband looked at her with not a shred of remorse. "These are my terms. Wearing naught but this," he said, gesturing at her nakedness, "ride through the town on your palfrey. From the gate to the field of lilies and back again. Then, and only then, I shall lift the tax as you desire."

She choked down a sob. Her neck ached.

His voice turned to pure bitterness. "If you would impoverish me, you must first impoverish yourself."

Godgivuh shivered. It was very cold in the hall. She lifted her heavy head to look at him. "And would you grant me leave, my lord, to do this?"

He looked taken aback for a moment, as if worried she actually would.

Then, he laughed. He threw back his head, and the laughter tore out of him, making him look mad.

"Yes," he said, his smile like acid, "I grant you leave. Choose for us. Shall we have shame or dignity? Shall we go naked or clothed? I grant you leave. If I have such a fool of a wife, then at least let it be known, that men may pity me."

Godgivuh did not know what to do. She remembered the words of a poem her tutor had read to her, which she had long kept:

Among the saints none is naked,  
for they have put on glory,  
nor is any clad in those leaves  
or standing in shame ...<sup>2</sup>

But Leofric was not thinking of saints. He had caught sight of something near her neck. "Ah," he sneered, "the comb still glitters in your hair. You are not yet naked."

He stepped forward and grabbed her head, jarring her sore neck. She cried out in pain. He ripped out the comb and the glittering net that covered her hair, pulling many fine strands with it.

Godgivuh grabbed the stone banquet table to steady herself. How her neck ached. It felt like the weight of the world was coiled on her head.

Weeping, she said, "In the name of all that is holy —"

"What is holy?" he screamed at her, and tore the delicate net apart. Jewelled beads fell to the floor and clattered like hail.

She fled the room.

Leofric blinked in surprise as she flitted away. Not because his wife was running out of the room without clothes on. But because he thought he saw — but it must have been a trick of the light.

He looked down at the mangled golden net in his hands, then threw it on the pile of clothes and turned his back on it.

He wandered past the table and ate some bacon. He ate it all, though he was not hungry. The last piece stuck in his throat, irritating him. He coughed, and tried to sit, and abruptly got back up again.

None of the windows in the hall opened onto the town. And he was too proud — proud? — to run to a different room and watch.

So he opened a window, and stood at the pane, and listened. He could hear the normal

sounds of the town bustling about below, on the other side of the wall. Then, there was a gasp and a shout, followed by a hush.

The Earl hushed too. There was a silence in his heart – a dread – as he stared at the empty heather field and listened, as if he could see with his ears.

Then at last, there was the lone sound of horseshoes on cobbles. The noise was persistent, gentle, and sharp, like someone pounding a tiny nail into his chest.

And like an enemy hurling an insult, there stood before his mind the words that had been read in his wedding, before they had been crowned in marriage – he would never have been crowned, were it not for her: *Husbands, love your wives.*

*Love your wives.*

Ever after, the folk of Coventry would say that as they listened to the palfrey's hooves strike the cobbles, they also heard, like a counter-melody to the stately hoofbeat, a man weeping. They say the voice sounded far away, but he wept as if from his soul, as if struck by her beauty.

Leofric did not count the beads as he picked them up. He groveled on his knees on the cold stone floor, picking up each one and placing them in his hands. His hands were wet; they seemed to fill with tears faster than he could fill them with gems and gold.

He knew the length of her hair. He knew all of her. He had measured the length of her spine against his hands, and the softness of her breasts against his lips, and her weight against the strength of his arms. He would recognise her from nothing but her fair toes, which he had kissed each in turn.

He knew the length of her hair.

He had dragged his rough hands through it only the night before, and it was down to her waist, at most.

And that is why Leofric, Earl of Coventry, when his wife stepped back into the hall, fell on his face.

"Rise, my lord," she said above him, after a long silence.

*I am not your lord*, he thought miserably. Her bare feet – surely they were cold on the stone floor – paced closer to him, and her auburn hair ever so slightly swept the floor around her ankles. He recoiled as the soft curtain threatened to brush his face.

"My lord," she said again. Her hand cupped his chin. He let her raise him to his feet.

She was naked – because of him, he thought, dizzy with shame – but, in another sense, she wasn't. Her hair – how, he did not even dare contemplate – had grown so long and full that it cloaked her whole body, down to her well-turned ankles. The gods themselves had clothed her. God had clothed her. To his shame.

Her arm shifted as she fingered a piece of her hair, and he could see her through the chink. His skin flushed from the shoulders up to look on her; he was married to Aphrodite, he was married to a saint.

“Don’t look away,” she said firmly. “It will not disappear, though you look away long.”

She held out a lock of hair so long that it brushed the floor. “Touch it and see.”

“Nay, it will burn my hands,” he wrung the words from his heart, wretched.

She stood silent, waiting, looking for all the world like a Venus from Italy, or, aside from her nakedness, somehow very like a Madonna in church.

“I stripped you,” he said finally, choking on shame. “I stripped you, and sent you out of doors, and how do I find that now, you are clothed, and I am naked?”

He couldn’t bear to look her in the eyes, but he could feel that she was gazing at him.

“Do you grant me my boon?” she said.

“I grant you all.”

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## Susan Francino

### Notes

1. Roger of Wendover, *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History*, trans. J.A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1844; facsimile reprint, Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1993), 314–15.
2. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 112. The author is aware that this hymn was not known in medieval England.

Felix Schlesinger  
(1833–1910), 'Besuch  
bei der Großmutter' /  
'Visiting Grandma'.



# My Grandmother's House

Sylvie Jane Lewis

is full of haunted mirrors / my grandmother's house  
is a coulsdon two-storey / my grandmother's house  
has beds too this or that / my grandmother's house  
has a bed just right / my grandmother's house  
is a bambi cassette / my grandmother's house  
is worth its weight in disposable cameras

my grandmother's house is a relic and a history  
london her refuge  
post-war, post-katyn, her father's murder  
post-camps, post-subhuman-labour  
here she housed the revival of herself  
filled her home with creatures. cat. mouse. bird.  
her daughters. a half-human sanctuary.

my grandmother's house / is a polish nursery rhyme  
my grandmother's house / is three kittens in the forest  
my grandmother's house / is an oven-baked pie  
my grandmother's house / is a fox slinking through the garden  
leaving gem-green shit behind / these drove my grandfather mad  
when little, i found these emeralds / oddly beautiful  
my grandmother's house / reluctant home to the wild

my grandmother's house / is a wolf in drag  
my grandmother's house / has a bellyful of stones  
my grandmother's house / is how i'd picture houses in books  
my grandmother's house / is in so many brontë novels  
though not grand / it became thornfield and manderley  
my grandmother's house / is every house i've ever read  
my grandmother lived in an imaginary house  
my grandmother's house / is a crow's nest / is a boat mast  
is baba yaga guarding the waters / is a nest of baby crows

my grandmother's house / is finding ways to pass the time  
my grandmother's house / eternally untouched by wifi  
my sister rummages for board games in a wooden trunk  
i put a pen to the page in my grandmother's house

in my grandmother's house / she narrates her wartime survival  
the dragon of kraków / could never subsume her  
we sit in a circle around her / as if round a fire  
my grandmother's house / is a passed-down tale  
one we won't stop telling / home to spells and songs  
generational metamorphosis / we were once children here

before we eat for the last time / in my grandmother's house  
we look out to the garden / all tall grass and weeds now.  
in the centre of the garden is a fox / not cunning but resting  
somewhere grandad's spirit / longs to chase her away  
fiery creature. sniffs the air / we stand silent, let her stay.  
burnt orange patch, curled up / on the green blanket of earth.  
my grandmother's house / has beds too this or that  
my grandmother's house / has a bed just right  
the fox sees us through the glass / nestles  
down. the world shelters her.  
we bid her goodnight in my grandmother's house.

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**Sylvie Jane Lewis**



W.H. Beard (William Holbrook, 1824-1900),  
'Red-Ridinghood and the Wolf'.



# Red and Wolfe

Denisha Naidoo

“**Y**ou forget that you murdered my grandma,” says Red without looking up from filing her nails.

“Why do you always come back to that?” Wolfe throws his arms in the air and stomps around the cabin.

Red stops filing. “Seriously? This again?”

“Yes, this again!” He stops pacing to face her. “I want to leave the cabin.”

Red lets out a sigh and shakes her head, knowing he couldn’t leave if he tried. The spell she cast over him years ago remains strong. “Do you want to go to prison? Is that what you want?”

“No.” He can feel his heart beating faster and his face getting hot. He clenches and unclenches his paws to calm down. “But that was decades ago.”

Red gets up from her chair, walks over to Wolfe and strokes his fur, scratching her fingers deep into his scruff just the way he likes. It always amazes her that he never asks about what happened to Grandma that night. “I can’t risk losing you too, Wolfie boo.” She takes his head in her hands, leaning her forehead against his. “With grandma gone, you’re all I have left in this world.”

Wolfe doesn’t want to leave Red alone, abandon her. She was the only one who ever cared about him, loved him. But it was so long ago; does anyone still care about that?

“You don’t know what it’s like out there,” Red says, stroking his fur, her fingers working their magic. “Everyone has guns now. You don’t have a chance.”

Outside the window, not far in the distance, Wolfe can see tall condo buildings. Not much forest left. He used to run freely for miles, his fur was thick and plush, his muscles taut and powerful. After decades of being locked in the cabin like a dog, he has gotten fat, his fur dull and falling out in patches. And the collar, he hates the collar, especially when she uses it to tie him to the stake in the yard, or worse, puts him in the cage in the basement when she goes into town. But then, she doesn’t always make him wear the collar, like today. And without Red, where would he go? How would he live?

A knock on the door interrupts his thoughts. No one ever comes to the cabin. Red pushes him into a dark corner with an expression that tells him to stay quiet and hidden.

“Hallo,” Wolfe hears a man’s voice with a German accent, “I am Hans, ja? And this, this is my sister Gretel.”

“Hello?” Red says, through the half-opened door.

“Um, ja,” Hans clears his throat, “so we are neighbours, ja?”

Red does not reply. She inspects the couple carefully trying to remember where she has seen them before. They are both blond and plump with startling blue eyes. Hans is dressed in Lederhosen and Gretel in a dirndl as though they are off to a German Oktoberfest festival, even though it is spring.

She takes in Gretel's stout figure and strong arms, her hair neat and tidy, the apron of her dirndl pressed. Hans is equally coiffed.

"Ja," says Gretel. "We used to live a few miles," she turns to point off into the forest, "that way, the ginger house. You know it?"

Red is quiet. Wolfe can see her slow nod of recognition.

"You know we got it from the witch after she die. Estate sale. Cheap," Hans says.

"Nobody wants a house with a dead witch," Gretel says.

"Oh, yes." Red taps her chin. "Now I remember. That old witch just up and died, choked to death on a chicken bone or was it a fire? Very sudden."

"Ja, ja," Hans chimes in, "I mean, we didn't know her, just got a deal on the house ... no one wants a house a witch died in."

"Lucky for us," Gretel says.

Red looks Hans over. "You fixed the house after the fire?"

"Ja, ja, I fix things nice. And Gretel, she keeps it clean and makes a good strudel!"

Red considers this. A handyman and housekeeper would be useful. Wolfe is good company and a good guard dog but other than that he is of limited use. Red reminds herself that Hans and Gretel have killed one witch already. She will have to be more careful with them.

Crouched in the corner, out of sight, Wolfe feels a leg cramp coming on.

"Oh, come now, we know about the wolf," Gretel says and shrugs her shoulders, giving Red a conspiratorial wink. "Who are we to judge?"

At this Wolfe goes to the door, slicking back his fur with his paws. It's been years since he's seen anyone but Red. "Wolfe." He holds out a paw. "Man, am I glad to see you folks. I've been cooped up in this cabin forever!"

Hans and Gretel back up. Wolfe snaps his mouth shut, realising the impact of his big toothy grin.

Red puts a hand on her hip, her expression conveying the unspoken words, *I told you so.*

"No, no," Hans reaches out and gives Wolfe's paw a shake. "We're neighbours. We're sorry we didn't come before but there was the incident with The Pigs."

Red raises her eyebrows.

"The Pigs, the three real estate pigs," Hans says. "Snapping up cheap housing, claiming it gets blown over in a strong wind or whatever and then building condos." He pauses to pull up his lederhosen. "Good money in condos, renting and selling."

Red throws Wolfe a sideways glance. Wolfe averts his eyes toward the floor and shrugs; how did he know blowing on a straw house would make it fall down? Of course, just like Red to use that against him, another reason to go to prison, she told him.

"We caught The Pigs eating the house before the deal went through. Nearly destroyed the roof!" Hans says. "But Gretel is good with the gingerbread baking, and I am good with the fixing."

Red and Wolfe both nod.

"Where are my manners." Red opens the door and gestures inside. "Come in, have a seat."

"Can I get you folks a beverage?" Wolfe asks, skittering about in excitement. "Tea, coffee? Homebrew? Make it myself." Wolfe says, catching himself before giving another one of his toothy grins.

"Do you have any gingerbread cookies?" Gretl asks.

"Yes, we do," Red says careful to conceal her excitement. "Wolfe, give them the special cookies, the ones I make just for you, the ones that look like the gingerbread people."

"Those are my favourite!" Wolfe's mouth waters remembering the day Red first gave him one of her special gingerbread cookies from her basket. He licks his chops before realising everyone is looking at him. Wolfe lets out a nervous laugh before disappearing into the kitchen. Hans, Gretel, and Red sit down in the living room.

Red feels her face flush as her guests look around the cabin, no doubt taking in the depressions in the sofa that they have sunk into, the scratches on the floor and walls from Wolfe's claws, the tattered curtains, the faint musky smell of wet wolf. She smiles at Hans. He would be a useful addition to fix the damage Wolfe has made. And Gretel, she can clean and maybe make new curtains. Once they eat the gingerbread cookies, casting the right spell will be easy.

"Gretel, are you good at sewing?"

"Oh yes, I am good with the sewing and the cooking and the cleaning," Gretel says.

"Lovely," Red says, working to conceal her excitement.

"Ja, ja, I'm good with the fixing and Gretel is good with the other things for the home. That's why we're here, for The Pigs."

"I thought you didn't like The Pigs?"

Hans waves a hand in the air. "Oh that, bygones."

"Bygones," Gretel pipes in.

"Ja, ja, they give us a good price for the ginger house. They build a condo, we are the property managers," Hans says. "The Pigs don't like dealing with the peoples."

Gretel nods in agreement.

Hans continues. "We", he puts a hand on Gretel's knee, "are good with the peoples."

"And keeping everything nice and working good, ja?" Gretel says putting her hand on Hans' hand and giving it a squeeze.

Red leans in. "You're a —"

"We don't like labels, ja? It's a long time alone in the woods." He turns to wink at Gretel, who blows him a kiss.

In the kitchen, Wolfe can be heard clattering about and muttering.

"He's excited," Red says, "we don't get visitors, ever ... after grandma died."

"Grandma?" Hans leans in.

"She died suddenly. Unexpected."

"Oh ja," Hans sits back. "Just like the witch."

Gretel winks.

Wolfe starts washing some glasses, searching for ones that he hasn't broken over the years, when he sees The Pigs standing around grandma's grave site. That can't be good, he thinks to himself. He peeks into the living room to see Hans's hand on Gretel's knee. What the ... ? They are deep in conversation. He goes back to the kitchen and quietly opens the back door. He can hear The Pigs deep in conversation.

They are in the process of surveying the property. Breath held; he watches The Pigs stumble across a human skeleton that has emerged from a shallow grave like a flower. They stop and smile at each other.

"This'll bring the property price down real good," one fat pig says.

"What about the wolf?" the second big pig asks.

The third pig, who is considerably smaller and thinner than the other two, replies, "He could be a problem." He pokes a stick at the grave. "Single gunshot to the back of the head. Small caliber. Derringer maybe." He meets the eyes of the other two pigs, who are nodding. "Could also be some type of magic." He leans on his stick, thinking. "But not the work of a wolf."

Wolfe quietly sneaks out the back door and into the nearby shrubs to get a closer view. Gunshot? He didn't shoot anybody, that he can remember ... he remembers finding the cabin, going inside, seeing this old gal in bed, a basket full of gingerbread cookies beside her and the rest is blank. Then he remembers being on the floor and seeing Red's face asking if he's ok. There was blood everywhere. "You killed her."

He remembers her saying that and then giving him some water – he had been so thirsty – and burying the body. But it's all a blur. His reverie is broken by The Pigs' voices.

"Boys, I don't think that wolf did this. I'm guessing that Red's a witch," the little pig says.

"Brick, straw and stick, the best way to catch a witch," the first fat pig says.

The little pig nods. "Exactly."

Wolfe hears the word 'witch' and runs. He runs like the wind. His body feels old and tight. His breath comes in ragged gasps, he can feel the adrenaline coursing through his veins, pushing him onward. Brush and brambles pull at his fur, and he is grateful that Red left him without the collar. He can smell the earth, the trees and his freedom. He keeps running.

Red notices that the cabin has become quiet. She smiles at her guests and holds up a hand gesturing toward the kitchen. "Let me just go check on Wolfe."

Hans and Gretel lean back into the sofa.

Red's heart starts to pound with a slow determined anger. The kitchen is empty. She glances out the window and sees The Pigs. They have managed to erect a shack of straw, brick, and sticks over the site of her grandma's grave. She flies out the back door red with rage. The Pigs glance up to see her charging at them. The two large pigs rush forward, grab her arms and slingshot her into the shed. The small pig slams the door shut behind her.

Red, furious, hits the back wall of the shed, turns around and throws herself at the door. She bounces off it before she even makes contact. Magic. She starts chanting spells and flings them at the door with her fingertips, but nothing happens. She reaches into her mind to find Wolfe but remembers that she took his collar off that morning. She can't reach him. Furious, she screams. The walls of the shed reverberate, but no sound escapes.

The Pigs smile and fist-bump each other. The little pig gives the order for the two big pigs to stay by the shed while he goes back into the cabin where Hans and Gretel are waiting.

"Well, that was easier than expected," the little pig says.

"Witch?" Hans asks.

The little Pig nods. "Witch."

Gretel gestures to the pocket of her dirndl. "We brought chicken bones".

"We contained her in a shed. She may be of use." The little pig surveys the cabin. "For now, let's get the deed to this place and tear it down. I have a good idea for a multi-unit condominium complex."

"And we can manage it, ja?" Hans puts his hand on Gretel's arm.

"Of course. You, G and we three will be rich."

Gretel surveys the cabin with the scratch marks and tattered curtains. "And the wolf?"

"Poor bastard's gone. Can't imagine what it was like living with that witch."

And with that The Pigs tear down the cabin and cut down more of the forest to build a multi-unit condominium complex managed by Hans and Gretel – or H and G, as they prefer to call themselves. Wolfe never returns. On occasion, he can be seen in the background of pictures from remote northern locations that travellers post on Instagram. Red remains alive in the shed built of brick, straw and stick with the remains of her grandma.

Now the eight-by-eight shed is embedded in the cement foundation of the condo complex. Occupants of the new condo complex move in but never move out. Some claim to hear faint screams late at night, but everyone knows that brand-new buildings can't be haunted or built by pigs.

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**Denisha Naidoo**



Walter Crane,  
'The Swan Maidens'  
(1894).

# A Folktale Telling

Ella Leith

**D**ad tells me a story. It starts with Jack sitting on the hearth, playing cards with his dog.

“How does the dog play cards?”

Dad smiles. “That’s just how the story goes.”

Jack’s mother sends him off to seek his fortune. She offers him a big bannock with a curse or a wee bannock with a blessing. He takes the wee bannock, and he takes the blessing, and off he goes. And the dog puts his paws up on the gate and howls.

I’m sad for the dog.

Off Jack goes to seek his fortune, and it’s hi to the road and it’s ho to the road, and there’s rest for all the birds in the trees, but there’s no rest for poor Jack.

He shares his wee bannock with a robin. And this robin can talk, and it directs him to a house where he can stay for the night. So off Jack goes, and he finds the house, and an old, old woman opens the door, so old she’s rocking backwards and forwards on her two front teeth.

Whatever that means.

Come in, Jack, I’ve been expecting you. And she feeds him a feast, and Jack goes to sleep in a feather bed, and wakes up in a coal shed.

“How did that happen?”

Dad’s eyes flash. “Magic!”

I snuggle into the crook of his arm, and wonder if she knew Jack’s name by magic, too.

So Jack leaves the coal shed, and it’s hi to the road and it’s ho to the road, and there’s rest for all the birds in the trees, but there’s no rest for poor Jack.

He comes to a pub, and inside he sees a group of men playing cards. And one of the men is winning, and he keeps winning until he has a big pile of gold in front of him. Jack looks at the man, and he looks at the gold, and he says to the barman, I’m going to play cards with that man.

And the barman says, you’re a fool. That’s the Green Man of Knowledge. You can’t beat him.

“Does the Green Man of Knowledge have green skin and green hair? Or is he just wearing green?”

Dad cocks his head. “What do you think?”

I think if his skin was green then Dad would have mentioned it as soon as Jack went into the pub. I think he would’ve said: Jack sees a group of men and one of them was green, and also they were playing cards.

"What if I was building suspense?"

Dad won't tell me if the Green Man is actually green or not.

Jack starts playing cards with the Green Man of Knowledge. And at first the Green Man wins some of Jack's money. But then Jack starts to win the Green Man's money, and before long he has the whole pile of gold. Because Jack's been practising with his dog, remember?

I miss the dog.

So the Green Man of Knowledge gets to his feet with a face like thunder. Take your winnings, Jack, but don't you dare follow me. And he walks out of the pub. Jack gathers up all the gold, and he says to the barman, I'm going to follow the Green Man of Knowledge.

"But he's already won!"

Jack goes to the blacksmith, and he says, make me a pair of iron shoes that I can wear to dust. And the blacksmith makes him his iron shoes, and off he goes to follow the Green Man of Knowledge.

"But why? Why does he follow the Green Man of Knowledge?"

Dad doesn't know. "Sometimes, something gets under your skin. Sometimes, you can't just let it go."

I'm beginning to think Jack isn't very sensible.

Anyway, it's hi to the road and it's ho to the road, and there's rest for all the birds in the trees, but there's no rest for poor Jack in his iron shoes.

Then, one day, when his iron shoes have worn to dust, Jack finds himself on the edge of a lake, and there on the other side is the Green Man of Knowledge's castle.

I want to know if the castle's green. Dad doesn't know, but he does know that there's no bridge, and there's no boat. So Jack sits down in the shelter of a tree and wonders what to do.

As he wonders, three young women come down to the water's edge. The first two are beautiful, but the youngest one is the most beautiful of all. They strip off their clothes, and wade into the water, and become swans – two dazzling white, and one inky black.

Swan-maidens! All the best stories have swan-maidens.

And Jack, he sneaks over, and he steals the clothes of the youngest swan-maiden. So when the swans become women again, the elder two put on their clothes and go off on their merry way. But the youngest one looks, and she looks, and she can't find her clothes anywhere.

Jack, she says, can you help me find my clothes?

Everyone seems to know Jack's name.

Jack says, I've got your clothes, and I'll give them to you if you'll carry me across this lake on your back.

On her back! Outrageous.

The young woman pleads with Jack. That's my father's castle, she says, and my father is the Green Man of Knowledge, and if you dare follow him, he'll kill you!

I'm increasingly confident that the Green Man of Knowledge isn't actually green, because Dad hasn't mentioned the daughters being green, and I expect those sorts of things run in the family.

But Jack ignores her pleas. She turns into a swan again, and Jack steps on her back, and she carries him across the lake, and on the other side he gives her clothes back.

I'm not sure I like Jack very much.

Jack, she says, I've tried to warn you, but now that I've carried you here, I'm bound to you forever. I will do my best to help you and to keep you safe from my father.

This seems a bit much, since it's not like Jack even needs to be there, really. But off he goes to the castle, and the Green Man of Knowledge is not very happy to see Jack, oh no, not at all.

But he pretends to be hospitable, and he takes Jack to a fine room with a four-poster bed and a lavish meal, and he tells Jack to rest and prepare for the morning. So Jack sits down on the edge of the four-poster bed, and it dissolves beneath him, and he finds himself in a dark cell on a pile of straw, with stale bread and water.

Ha.

But then he hears a rustling in the corner, and a mouse runs over. Jack, it's me, it's the Green Man of Knowledge's daughter!

She's a mouse-maiden too! Lots of good animals in this story.

Jack, she says, my father is going to set you three impossible tasks, and if you don't succeed, he'll kill you. But I'm going to help you. Tomorrow, he'll tell you to retrieve a ring from the deepest well in the castle. As soon as he goes away, close your eyes, click your fingers, and when you open your eyes, there'll be a ladder of bones in the well.

Bones?! I snuggle closer to Dad.

That ladder will be made of my bones, Jack, so you need to be very, very careful as you climb down. Because if your foot slips and you break *one* bone, you'll be breaking one of *my* bones, and it could be my neck.

So, the next day, the Green Man of Knowledge drops a ring into the deepest well in the castle, and he tells Jack to get the ring back in one hour. And Jack closes his eyes, and he clicks his fingers, and when he opens his eyes, there's a ladder of bones stretching down into the well.

Very carefully, he climbs down the ladder.

And Jack gets to the bottom of the well, and he finds the ring, and he puts it in his pocket, and he begins to climb up the ladder of bones.

But Jack's feeling a bit pleased with himself now, and he stops being careful, and *crack!* I gasp.

Then I am furious. Jack had *one job*. And now he's broken the neck of a swan-and-mouse-maiden who can turn her bones into a ladder. What an idiot.

I'm starting to think Jack isn't a very good hero.

Oh no, Jack says, I've broken her neck!

And he hurries back up to the top of the well. And the ladder of bones turns back into the girl, and she's white with pain. She says, you were lucky, Jack, you only broke my baby finger. I'll wear gloves, so my father won't know I'm helping you.

She's *still* going to help him, even after that!

So Jack gives the ring to the Green Man of Knowledge, and he's not very happy, oh no. But he takes Jack back to the fine room with the four-poster bed, and again Jack finds himself on straw in a cell with stale bread and water, and serve him right.

The next day, the Green Man of Knowledge sets the second impossible task, to clear a forest of ants in just one hour. And the girl appears, and she tells Jack to go to sleep, and when he wakes an hour later there are no ants in the forest at all.

And the Green Man of Knowledge is not very happy, oh no, and Jack's back in the room with the four-poster bed and then back in the dark cell.

The next day the Green Man of Knowledge sets the third impossible task, to build a castle bigger and grander than his own, in just one hour. And the girl appears, and Jack sleeps, and when he wakes up an hour later, before him is the biggest, grandest castle in the world.

And the Green Man of Knowledge is not very happy, oh no, but he has to let Jack go, because Jack's beaten him, because he completed the impossible tasks.

"But he didn't do anything!"

"No, but he still won."

"She did everything!"

"Yes, he only wins because she helped him. This type of story used to be called *The Girl As Helper in the Hero's Flight*, because the girl always helps the hero."

"But why is he the hero? What did he do?"

"Well, he let himself be helped. That's not always easy."

I don't know if that's enough to make him the hero.

The Green Man of Knowledge tells Jack to choose a horse from his stables to ride home. And in the stables, Jack sees two beautiful horses, dazzlingly white, and one little scruffy donkey.

And he thinks to himself, these must be the Green Man of Knowledge's daughters. So he chooses the little donkey. And as they ride away, she says, don't get complacent, Jack. My father and my sisters will come after us.

A swan-mouse-donkey-maiden! She's *definitely* the hero.

So Jack looks over his shoulder, and he sees the Green Man of Knowledge coming after them in a chariot drawn by the two white horses.

And the donkey says, reach into my left ear, Jack, and throw what you find there over your left shoulder; and I hope it will slow my father down.

So Jack reaches into her left ear, and he finds a small grain of dirt, and he throws it over his left shoulder. And behind him he sees a huge range of mountains stretching as far as the eye can reach. And he whoops and he crows, slow down, my dear, no one could cross those mountains and catch us!

But the donkey won't slow down – you don't know my father, Jack, he's the Green Man of Knowledge, he'll be after us yet.

And sure enough, before long Jack looks over his shoulder, and he sees the Green Man of Knowledge coming after them with his chariot and white horses. And the donkey says to him, reach into my left ear, Jack, and throw what you find there over your left shoulder; and I hope it will slow my father down.

So Jack reaches into her left ear, and he finds a drop of water, and he throws it over his left shoulder. And behind him he sees a huge flood stretching as far as the eye can reach, the water roaring and churning in spate. And he whoops and he crows, slow down, my dear, no one could cross that flood and catch us!

But the donkey won't slow down – you don't know my father, Jack, he's the Green Man of Knowledge, he'll be after us yet.

Sure enough, before long Jack looks over his shoulder, and he sees the Green Man of Knowledge riding hard after them with his chariot and horses. And they're getting closer and closer. And the donkey says to him, reach into my left ear, Jack, and throw what you find there over your left shoulder; and I know it will stop my father.

So Jack reaches into her left ear, and he finds a small spark of flame, and he throws it over his left shoulder. And behind him he sees a huge roaring wildfire stretching as far as the eye can reach, and he sees the Green Man of Knowledge and the two white horses burning into ash.

I hide my face in Dad's shirt.

At last the donkey slows down. And she stops, and Jack gets off her, and she turns back into the Green Man of Knowledge's daughter. I've done something terrible, Jack. I've killed my father and my sisters for you, because I love you. I must go away now to atone for what I've done. And she kisses Jack on the lips.

I'll come back to you, Jack, in a year and day. But you mustn't let anyone else kiss you until then. Because if you do, you'll forget all about me.

Jack says, I promise, my love, I won't let anyone kiss me but you.

So they go their separate ways, and it's hi to the road and it's ho to the road, and there's rest for all the birds in the trees, but there's no rest for poor Jack.

When he reaches home, his mother comes running out of the cottage towards him with her arms wide. And Jack yells, don't kiss me, Mother! And she stops in her tracks.

But Jack's dog also comes running towards him.

The dog!

I'd forgotten about the dog.

The dog leaps over the fence, and he jumps on Jack, and he licks him all over his face.

And Jack forgets everything.

"Everything?"

"Yes."

"Even the girl?"

"Everything."

I am quiet.

But Jack's a rich man now from the gold he won, and he courts a girl from his village, and they decide to get married. And the wedding day is set, and I fume silently.

But on the eve of the wedding – as it happens, a year and a day after Jack left the Green Man of Knowledge's daughter – there's a knock at the door. There's a ragged girl standing there, and she asks to see the bridegroom, because she has a trick to show him to celebrate his wedding.

She brings out of her pocket a little wind-up cat and a little wind-up hen, and she puts them on the ground in front of Jack.

And the little wind-up hen says to the little wind-up cat, do you not remember me? I am your one true love.

The little wind-up cat says, no, I don't remember you.

Do you not remember how I carried you over the lake to my father's castle?

No, I don't remember that.

Do you not remember how I completed three impossible tasks for you, and helped you escape on my back?

No, I don't remember that.

Do you not remember how I said I'd return in a year and day, but you mustn't let anyone kiss you until then?

And the wind-up cat doesn't say anything.

And the ragged girl looks Jack right in the eyes. Do you not remember me, Jack? I am your one true love.

Jack says, no, I don't remember you.

Do you not remember how you pulled a speck of dirt and a drop of water from my ear, and mountains and floods appeared behind us?

No, I don't remember that.

Do you not remember, Jack, that I killed my father and my sisters for you?

And Jack doesn't say anything.

The ragged girl says, do you not remember, Jack, how I made myself into a ladder of bones for you, and you slipped on a rung, and you broke my baby finger?

And she pulls off her glove, and she holds up her hand, and Jack sees her crooked baby finger.

Jack says, yes, my love. Yes, I do remember that.

And he walks over to her, and he kisses her, and he marries the Green Man of Knowledge's daughter instead, and they live happily ever after.

Dad sits back.

I sit up.

"That's *it*?"

Dad smiles. "Didn't you like the story?"

"That's all it took? After he forgot about all about her? You can't just magic away forgetting!"

"But that was magic, too."

But that magic made sense. This makes no sense at all.

I splutter out my objections.

"But what about the woman Jack was going to marry? What happens to her?"

"And why was there a wind-up cat and a wind-up hen?"

"And why was he called the Green Man of Knowledge?"

"What was the knowledge?"

Dad's eyes are twinkling.

"That's how it was told to me."

"Well, it's silly.

"The whole story is silly.

"It doesn't make any sense.

"Tell it again."

.....

**Ella Leith**

AI-generated egg.



# The Green Egg

Claire Rakich

Once there lived a woman whose father possessed an egg. It had once belonged to her grandmother, she knew, but she had never been told where it came from. As a child, she had asked, but the subject had been forbidden and she had been warned in the most serious tones never to tell anyone else of its existence.

The egg was large and shone a burnished golden-green. It was kept hidden beneath piles of blankets at the back of an out-of-the-way cupboard, the key concealed in the roof's low rafters.

When she had been very small, the woman had simply accepted its presence and had thought very little about it. As she grew older, however, she began to notice her father's troubled expression each winter when the blankets were needed and he was forced to look upon the egg. Soon, she too began to view it with fear and resentment, and to wonder why their family had been cursed with something so strange and shameful.

One terrible day, her father died and the egg passed to her. Red-eyed from crying, she opened the cupboard door and pulled it gingerly from its hiding place. It glowed faintly between her fingers, as if it mocked her, and she knew she had to destroy it.

She beat it with a rock, but stone left no mark on it. She dropped it from a high precipice; she threw it into the river; she abandoned it deep in the forest. But after every attempt, she returned wearily home to find the egg waiting for her on the kitchen table.

After a while, she returned it to its hiding place and attempted to put it out of her mind. Try as she might, though, she lived with the daily fear that one day her secret would be exposed.

To divert suspicion, the woman worked hard to be a respectable member of her village. She bound her hair in a tight plait, wore plain dresses of dark blue and green, and each night, she sewed other dresses which she sold by day in the marketplace. Her garden, which faced the street, was neat and ordered, and in it she planted the same white roses, cornflowers, and rows of potatoes and cabbages which grew in all the others.

One day, the woman met a man who was visiting the village. There was little affection between them, and few tears shed when he returned to his own people,

but shortly after, she gave birth to a daughter. Her baby was placed in her arms and, as she stared into unfocused blue eyes, at the tiny starfish fingers, she knew it was her turn now to encumber a precious creature with a terrible burden. Tears dropped upon the tiny head.

Time passed at the cottage. The woman sewed and the girl scampered to school on spindly legs, her lengthening plait swinging like a rope behind her. It was several years before the child learned of the egg. The woman, horrified that the moment had come, begged her never to speak of it again. She saw worry flicker over her daughter's face, but the girl did as she was told.

That winter, the worst snowstorm anyone could remember came to the village. In every house, people stuffed their windows with moss and rags, plugging up draughts and blocking out the light. They gathered provisions together, bolted their doors, then settled inside to wait out the storm.

One night, as snow battered the house and the wind shrieked, the girl, wrapped in an enormous blanket, looked up from her seat beside the fire.

"Is someone knocking at the door, Mother?"

The woman paused in her sewing. There it was: a sharp, insistent tapping. She went cautiously to the door, pressing her ear to it. A voice spoke, barely audible over the cry of the storm.

"Please, friend. The wind howls and no one will let me in. If you do not open your door, I'll be dead by morning."

She stepped back quickly. To open the door would be madness; the wind was so strong, it might never shut again. Frowning, she returned to the hearth. Whoever it was should have prepared better for the storm.

"Please, friend," came the voice again, louder this time. "The wind howls, and no one will let me in. If you do not open your door, I'll be dead by morning."

The woman picked up her sewing once more. The voice would soon be gone. Besides, nobody could enter the house – there was the egg to consider. She had been too careful for too long to risk everything now.

The voice spoke a third time: "Please, friend. The wind howls, and no one will let me in. If you do not open your door, I'll be dead by morning."

Glancing up, the woman saw that the girl was watching her, waiting to see what she would do. The memory of her own father's kindness suddenly came to her; how he had always tried to help a person in need. She looked into her daughter's eyes. One day, the girl would suffer the curse of the green egg. But today, if the woman chose, she could also pass on a different legacy.

The garment fell from her knees as she returned to the door. Loosening the heavy bolt, she took a deep breath, then wrenched it open with both hands.

The driving snow felt like a fist in her face. Something hurtled past her into the cottage and she pushed hard against the door, fighting to close it. She felt her daughter beside her, lending her strength, and for one terrible moment, it seemed as though the storm would win; then with a last effort, the door finally closed. Re-bolting it with stiff fingers, they sagged against the wood. Snow lay on the flagstones. The fire had gone out.

A magpie hopped from behind the table to examine the fireplace. It flew to the roof, retrieved a large beakful of thatch and descended to thrust it into the embers, beating its wings until the flames returned to life. Ignoring the woman's protests, the bird dragged her unfinished sewing over to soak up the thawing snow. Then, settling itself on the girl's cushion, it turned its head to the woman.

"Thank you, friend, for saving my life," it said. "One day I will repay your kindness."

For a moment, there was silence. Then the girl laughed and resumed her seat by the fire, placing the magpie on her lap. With a sigh, the woman joined them.

The magpie stayed with them through the winter. It was often infuriating; relentlessly nosy, it stole food from their plates and chattered and jabbered so much that the woman sometimes wished she had left it on the doorstep. But the creature was kind and loyal, and it cared for them. Very soon, they could not imagine life without it.

One day, when the snow had melted, the school had reopened and the first shoots of spring had emerged, the magpie found the green egg.

When the woman entered the room to discover the key in the open cupboard door, blankets on the floor and the egg gleaming in the sunlight, she gripped the door frame to keep herself from falling.

The magpie was hopping around it excitedly. "What's this?" it chattered. "An egg, a shiny green egg!"

With a roar, the woman kicked out at the magpie, who squawked and flapped away. She fell to her knees, fumbling to conceal the egg.

"Meddling bird!" she cried, "I should have left you in the snow!" She glared at the bird, who was now gazing down at her from the thatch, out of harm's way. Her mind was racing. Now that it knew, it could not be allowed to live. She would catch it in a net, wring its little neck. When her daughter returned, she would tell her it had flown away, back to the forest and the other birds ...

The magpie appeared to be watching her closely. "Why does it trouble you so much, friend?"

For a moment, the woman said nothing. Then tears filled her eyes.

"The egg is evil," she muttered. "It has blighted my family for generations, and it cannot be destroyed. My father lived a life of fear and shame because of it,

then I was cursed too. One day it will pass to my poor girl. It was meant to be hidden, until you came."

"So that is what it is." The magpie seemed to ponder her words for a long time. Then it flew down and perched on the cupboard shelf to face her.

"By saving my life you gave me a great gift," it said. "Now I shall give one in return. These eggs are forged within us and they are shaped by the trials and fortunes of those who came before. This is not your father's egg, or your daughter's – it is yours. And so, it is you who must decide: will you hide it and keep yourself small and fearful, or will you hatch it and see what comes?"

The woman stared at the bird. She had never heard such madness. And yet ... how might it feel to do as the creature said?

The magpie fluttered its wings, hopping to the shelf's edge. "I have said what I can – now I will return to the forest. Farewell, my dear friend. Perhaps one day we shall meet again." Then, spreading its wings wide, it shot through the open window and was gone.

The cottage was quiet after the magpie's departure. On the fourth day, the woman took the egg from the cupboard, cradled it in a blanket and placed it in front of the fire. When her daughter asked, she told her: "I have decided to stop being afraid."

At first, its presence in the room made her uneasy. As the warmer days went by, though, she found herself talking to it in the morning while she made breakfast, and singing to it in the evening while she sewed.

One summer morning, the woman was roused from sleep by her daughter.

"Mother, wake up!"

"What has happened?"

"Come and see."

They ran past the empty fireplace – where shards of iridescent shell strewed the floor – through the open door and into the garden. The girl whirled back to face the house, her exhilarated face illuminated by the early sun.

"Look!"

There upon the roof sat a gold-green bird. Its body was as thick and stocky as an owl's and a lustrous plume crested its peacock-like head. The large wings were spread wide like a cormorant's, its long feathers gleaming emerald, turquoise and jade. Gold talons gripped the thatch, and when it opened its mighty beak and sang, the sound entered the woman's heart like a shard of sunlight. As she stared up at the green bird, she felt warmth spread through her chest, her limbs, her face.

As the girl danced in the dewy grass, neighbours emerged from nearby cottages to marvel at the bird.

“Where did it come from?” they asked. But the woman just smiled.

The bird remained on the roof, as did the warmth in the woman's heart. Changes began to occur. She still sewed as hard as ever, but her garments seemed dull and lifeless now. She traded some with a traveller for bolts of crimson and sapphire velvet, and cut the dresses into pieces before patching them with bright windows of colour. She began to wear them herself to sell them in the market square.

Unbinding her plait, she wove scarlet ribbons through her unruly hair. Her daughter ran to school in skirts of red and blue. In her garden, she planted fiery nasturtiums amongst the cabbages, outlandish delphiniums beside the potatoes and strange shrubs transplanted from the forest beside the garden gate. When the midsummer sun shone, she lay beneath them to watch their gigantic leaves glow overhead, as the bird on the roof continued to sing.

The villagers were perplexed; surely their neighbour had gone mad. When they counselled caution, she smiled and continued about her business. They muttered and shook their heads, but they had their own lives to lead and were preoccupied with their own concerns. After a while, they merely sniffed disapprovingly when they passed her in the street. Besides, they had to admit that the green bird was beautiful. Fancy it coming to their village of all places.

There was one among them, however, who looked at the bird and felt terror take root in their heart. They made admiring sounds along with the others, but they thought of the pearl-pink egg buried beneath the floor of their own cottage, and found they were unable to sleep for worry. The bird was clearly dangerous. And what if people began to wonder whether there were other strange things in the village? What if a search was made? Their own carefully constructed world would come tumbling down around them.

One night, when the first autumn leaves began to change, the village slumbered and the creature crooned to itself drowsily upon the roof, the fearful villager crept outside with a slingshot, took aim, and shot the green bird.

With an ear-splitting cry, it tumbled from the roof in a flurry of feathers. The neighbour fled. The woman and her daughter rushed outside to find ... nothing. The bird had vanished.

The woman stared at the empty spot on the roof, and as her daughter began to sob beside her, felt her heart break in two. She was the cause of this. The egg had been safe, hidden carefully for generations and yet *she* had been the one to expose it to the world. She hadn't even thought to keep watch on it. Now she finally knew the real curse: that she had never deserved something so precious and true. Now her daughter would go to her grave with no egg, no bird. She had deprived her child of any chance to do things better. What a fool she had been.

Shutting her ears to her daughter's cries, she ran blindly into the forest. Without her, her girl would at least have some chance to live an unblighted life. The best thing she could do now was to stay far away.

The woman stumbled through undergrowth for hours. At last, she came upon a cave used for storing animal pelts, now long forgotten. As birds left the forest for warmer lands and the year began to die around her, she gathered firewood and foraged for food amongst the fallen leaves.

When the dark nights came and winter dropped an icy blanket on the world, she shivered under layers of furs, gazing unseeing into the fire. She only stirred to eat what she needed to keep herself alive, unsure why she was bothering. Sometimes when the wind howled, she thought she could hear her daughter calling, but she did not stir. The girl was better off without her.

After what felt like an eternity, the cold winds ceased. One day, when buds studded the branches like pearls, the woman heard her daughter's voice calmly calling for her amongst the trees.

Unable to ignore her, she emerged from the cave. The fragile sun warmed her face and birdsong echoed around the clearing. She approached her daughter, taking a breath and finding courage in the smell of the damp, rich earth.

The girl smiled at her mother and held out her hand. "Come home."

The woman shook her head. "I can't." Looking down, she noticed how thin her own hands had become.

"You can," the girl insisted, a stubborn look on her face, "come home and learn the truth at last."

The woman lifted her gaze to her daughter. The girl was taller; almost a woman herself now, she realised with a wistful pang of love. At last, she nodded.

Mother and daughter emerged from the forest. Soon they were passing familiar streets, then rounding the corner to their own home. There was the garden with its bright new leaves, there was the cottage, and there, on the roof, proud and beautiful as ever, was the green bird!

Catching sight of them, it flapped its wings as if to shake something from its feathers and began to sing. As though they had been waiting for a signal, her neighbours burst from their houses, calling greetings to her, and shouting for joy.

"Why are they cheering?" the woman asked, astonished.

The girl was smiling up at the bird. "Because it has not sung since you went away."

"Sung? It was dead!"

"No, Mother. The next morning, it was on the roof again as if nothing had happened. I have been searching for you all winter to tell you!"

"But ... how?"

Her daughter took her hand. "There is so much you do not understand. The bird cannot be killed, not while you breathe. You give it life and you make it sing." The girl blinked back tears, "You have taught me not to hide. One day, a bird will sing on my roof, because of your courage."

A lump formed in the woman's throat. "But I left you."

The girl shook her head, pointing at the green bird. "No, you didn't."

The woman could not speak; she simply embraced her daughter. Hand in hand, they returned to their cottage. Outside, the green bird continued to sing.

In a nearby cottage, a man looked up and smiled at the sound. He stood for a moment, listening. Glancing down at the bright vermillion egg he had retrieved from the hidden space in the wall, he nodded to himself. Then he moved across the room and set it carefully upon the windowsill in full view of the road. Stepping back, he watched as the strengthening sun illuminated his egg like a piece of fiery coal.

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**Claire Rakich**



Henry Fuseli, 'The Shepherd's Dream',  
from *Paradise Lost* (c. 1793).

# The Stepmother's Tale

Lawrence Wilson

“A year and a day you must wait.” That’s what all the old folk of the village said, their eyes narrowing with something akin to fear, or uneasiness, or suspicion. And so a year and a day it was, a year and a day I waited, from the day that Jhon’s wife disappeared from their cottage (without a word or a sign to anyone!) to the day that Jhon and I were wed. A year and a day, and a long year it was, for me, the waiting, the wondering, the slow turning of Jhon’s heart from thoughts of mourning to thoughts of me. Six months passed, then eight, and finally I heard those longed-for words from Jhon’s own lips: “Aleen, will you be my wife?” Yes, praise the Lady, his heart wound was healing, the secret scar fading, and we could be happy together!

The village headwoman joined our hands with more than the usual ceremony and more than the usual blessing, and all through the wedding feast, I heard the low whispers, the murmurs behind hands, that Jhon’s first wife had been taken, that what the Good Folk took once, mightn’t they take again? That perhaps Jhon was not fated to keep any wife. But I smiled, I danced, I feasted and I laughed, for now I was married to Jhon, my Jhonni, the handsomest farmer in the township, tall and strong and steady. I felt safe enough in my bed at night, for though I could cook and clean and sew a neat thread, and though I was comely enough, I was never the ravishing fair beauty that Chrysa had been – no one else had had lips so red, a smile so winsome, and hair so yellow, a mane of pale curls spilling to her waist. No, I was as dun and dark-eyed as most of the farmers in these parts. Surely the Good Folk would have no interest in beguiling me away. If that was indeed what had happened – there are deep bogs around our village, dangerous marshes, and some women do go a-wandering in their wits, just after childbirth.

For not only was I Jhon’s wife, I was suddenly Jhonlin’s stepmother as well. A beautiful little boy, with his father’s bog-brown eyes and his mother’s wealth of bright curls. A beautiful boy indeed, and no trouble at all, for all that his mother had abandoned him in his cradle, and when my own son was born, and then my daughters, I raised our brood strictly and fairly and played no favourites, sharing out in equal parts the whacks to the bottom and the heart-warming hugs, and the brothers and sisters grew up with only love for each other in their hearts, and Jhonlin the most loving of the lot. Scarcely a summer’s day could go by without him bringing me a fistful of flowers from the meadow – the rich yellow sun-daisies that I loved best – and never an evening without his fair head resting on my knee at the fireside, begging a bedtime story. A loving husband and family, and the farm was prospering, the mustardseed oil and bog-cotton bringing in fine prices year after year, and no sickness lasted long, no droughts in summer, and the gentlest of snowfalls all the winters long. At least, so

I remember them. But I am old now, and long steeped in sin, and perhaps my memory plays tricks on me, like the will-o'-the-wisp in the marshes leading travellers astray.

No, I will not believe that! It was a good life, and we were happy. Jhon was a contented man. If he still mourned the vanished Chrysa, he gave no sign of it to me.

But then Jhonlin turned seven years old, and Chrysa came back.

It was in the autumn time, the golden time, the harvest almost in, and just one day until the Turning Day of the year; the beginning of the dark season, when the sun goes somersaulting down into winter; the day when the old folk in the marsh-villages say that the dead go walking, that the Good Folk go riding from their summer palace on the Lady's Island to their winter castle in the mountains. Turning Eve, and as I slept beside my husband, I tossed and turned with evil dreams of clutching hands, of claws and screams and sharp blades thrusting. I woke with a start to find Jhon's side of the bed empty, and from somewhere – outside the house? inside my own head? – I heard a voice calling, a voice singing, sweet and pure and high. My heart was beating hard in my breast as I crept to the window and parted the curtain – just a sliver! just a crack! – and peered out, my breath catching in my throat for fear.

A fear which doubled, trebled, when I saw below, lit by fitful moonlight through fast-scudding clouds, standing still as if bound by wire, my husband, my Jhon, hands clenched into fists by his side, standing at the gate into the wide pasture we called Thornapple for its wealth of prickle-bushes, rooted to the ground but staring, staring, over the gate and into the field at the figure of a tall woman, cloaked and hooded against the frisking wind.

Her hair, where the wind had tugged it from its binding, was an arm-span long, curly as wood-shavings, and silver-pale in the silvering moonlight. I knew her by that hair: I knew what colour it would be by daylight: yellow, rich yellow, bright yellow, yellow as daisies, yellow as the sun. It was Chrysa, by the merciful Lady! Singing in that winsome voice of hers, but with a new power to it, somehow, a new hook, an enchantment which terrified me even as it fascinated my husband. With a trembling hand, I opened the casement a finger's width, for she was speaking.

"Not a word, Jhon, for my time is short. Tomorrow it will be seven years and seven days since I was kidnapped from your side, seven years and seven days of nursing the wee sickly babes of the Good Folk, seven years and seven days of this endless waking nightmare and this endless waking dream. Tomorrow night at midnight, the Host shall ride the Old Way, over marsh and bog, over stone and thorn, and if you would have me back, watch for the passing of the Folk at the crossroads by the Holi Stone. If you would have me back, there are four things you must do without fail from the moment the sun sets: eat no meal, wear no shoes, speak not a single word, and touch not any metal, not gold nor silver, not bronze nor iron, lest the charm go awry. Then when the very last of the Host are passing, you must leap up and seize the bridle of the hindmost horse, a piebald mare, which I shall be riding. Do not let go, whatever the Folk might say or whatever the Folk might do, or I will be lost to you forever. Oh Jhon, oh my love, do not fail me!"

And with a fading cry that was like an echo of her enticing song, she flung her shadowy cloak about her and vanished. Where Chrysa had seemed to stand there was no footprint nor mark, though my Jhon, suddenly free of whatever enchantment had held him, knelt long in the grass there, searching with trembling hands in the eerie moonlight.

I, too, felt shivered and shaken by the tale revealed by the long-vanished woman. Taken by the Folk! An evil fate, for all the jeweled splendour which the Good People were rumoured to possess. Nursemaid, plaything, slave! If she might be rescued, then she must be rescued, returned to her place in the village ... ah, but here my heart gripped tight and, some might say, froze solid. Returned? Returned to what place? To this house? To this man? What, then, of me, and what of the children?

Scarcely breathing, I eased the window shut and closed the curtain on the sight of Jhon, still on his knees by the gatepost. I was careful to make no sound, and so I heard – or thought I heard – the quiet *snick!* of another window closing. From the children's room upstairs?

It was some time before my husband came back to bed. I do not think he slept at all, the rest of that night. Nor did I, but we spoke no word between us, and I think that he was scarcely aware that I lay there beside him.

Sunset comes early on Turning Eve.

I do not remember how I got through that day. I must have fed my family, baked the bread, washed the clothes and the dishes, but I do not remember. Jhon must have gone to the barn, milked the cows, hurried into the fields for the last of the harvest, but I do not remember. Jhonlin, I think, must have taken it upon himself to keep the younger ones quiet, and out of the way of their silent and strange and blank-eyed mother. Just before sunset I came to myself, seated by the fire, eyes stinging, needle and thread in my hand and a tumble of forgotten mending in my lap. A mug of sweet, milky tea was gently steaming at my elbow, but I do not remember pouring it. Jhonlin had the thimbles out of my sewing basket and was entertaining the littler ones with a tappity-tap fingerdance, but I do not remember him rummaging through the needles and spools of thread.

The evening light was heavy and level and golden-yellow – a horrid time of day, one I have never liked since, the world turning yellow, wicked yellow, alluring yellow – and there was a good dinner simmering in the pot, surely tempting to a man who'd been working all day in the grain-field. Surely he'd eat, and spoil the charm? Within my breast my heart grew colder and smaller with each passing breath. When Jhon came through the door from their fields, all our eyes turned to him. He did not smile. Nor did we.

"There's stew, Da," Jhonlin said, his voice trembling, as mine would have, could I have spoken aloud. "And fresh bread, and honey."

"I won't be eating, son," Jhon said, and that was all he said, for through the open door we all saw the yellowy-red globe of the sun touch the rim of the world, and Jhon's mouth clamped shut as if his teeth were bolted together. The children watched, wide-eyed, as their father removed his heavy hobnailed work-boots, his wide belt with its bronze buckle, his thick

homespun jacket with its brass buttons, and the silver chain and luck-charm from around his neck. With a grimace of apology for me, he slowly slid the gold wedding ring from his left hand and left it with the other metal items on the bench by the door.

Slowly, terribly slowly, he hugged each child. The little ones knew that something was strange and queer this night, but none of them whispered a word or a question. Jhonlin clung to his father the longest, not speaking, tears streaking his cheeks, then herded the younger ones ahead of him, up the stairs to bed.

Jhon opened his arms to me, and I, suddenly unfrozen, leaped up from my rocking chair, scattering the pile of mending, and buried my face in his neck. I gripped him so tightly, you'd think no man, however strong his arms, would have been able to pull away! But he did. Jhon loosened my clutching hands, gently wiped my tearstained cheeks, and turned to go.

With a cry, I embraced him again. He made a noise in his throat, almost growling, almost frowning. His face was very still, very sad, but there was something else there as well, a kind of – excitement? Anticipation?

I let Jhon put me aside. But before I loosened my hug – Lady forgive me! – before I let him go, I slipped the slim, sharp steel mending needle, held forgotten between my thumb and forefinger, through the rough fabric at the back of his collar, and left it there.

Sunset comes early on Turning Eve, and it is a long time from sunset until the dawning, and if I had sleepwalked through the day, I paid for it that night, awake, aching and exhaustingly awake, rocking in my chair, staring at the ebbing fire, not crying, not speaking, but with the pulse in my veins as loud and painful as hoofbeats, as whip-blows. I tell you true when I say that my only thoughts were a droning, heavy, unrepentant prayer: Lady, Lady, don't let her take my man. Lady, Lady... The rocker creaked, the wind brushed tree-fingers against the cottage windows, and once upstairs a child cried out in a bad dream. Below, locked in my own bad dream, I did not move. I did not speak. I rocked, and I prayed. Lady, Lady...

(Sometimes, as the years have turned, I have thought that such prayers must be a sin, a wicked selfishness. Other times I have felt that they are just the way it is, the way we are, and that the Lady in Her wisdom knows that we cannot help but pray them, anymore than we can keep from freckling in the summer sunlight.)

In the first silver-grey dawnlight of Turning morn, there came a scrabbling sound at the latch. I rose stiffly and crept to the door, pained in knee and hip and neck, to find Jhon, my Jhon, leaning there, his clothes heavy with dew, his bare feet run bloody, his eyes wide and unseeing. He did not speak. I do not think he saw me, even, not then and not for many days.

He was alone. Praise the Lady, he was alone!

I found young Jhonlin at my elbow, nervous and silent, and between the two of us, we managed to get Jhon up the narrow stairs and into bed. He collapsed like a dead man, but he breathed. I watched him, scarcely leaving his bedside. He slept. He breathed. I watched him, and held one of his wide, calloused hands gripped tightly in mine. Jhonlin managed breakfast for the younger ones, fed and watered the stock, gathered the eggs. When he

brought me a mug of soup at midmorning, I could unbend enough to find a smile for him, and a quick hug. My Jhonlin. My son. My son. Mine forever; now.

For when I'd stripped my husband of his sodden clothing, taking care to remove my secret needle from the collar of his shirt, I'd pricked my finger on a second needle, caught and hidden in a fold of the fabric, lower down, waist-high – about as high as Jhonlin might reach, hugging his father goodbye on a frightening Turning Eve.

Jhon kept to his bed for a week, and for many weeks after he crept about the farm like an old, stiff-jointed man. He would not speak, and scarcely ate, and he grew dangerously thin. But even a heart scarred as badly as my Jhon's must someday heal, and between the children's artless, endless chatter and Jhonlin's sturdy patience and my rich cooking, he grew healthy again, and even stout, as the years passed. He was ever a quiet man, prone to stillness and a distant-eyed, brooding listening, and though he took to drinking more ale than was good for him, we were happy enough together; a happy family once again, and when he died, the whole township mourned him.

Now I am an old woman, rocking in the same chair before the same fireplace. My daughters married decent men on distant farmlands, and they visit me twice a year, perhaps, at Yule and at Midsummer. My younger son went away to one of the Queen's wars, and fought bravely, so his captain told me, and some days, when the mood is upon me, I open the small carved box which holds his shiny medals, and have a bit of a cry. But it is Jhonlin, my brave little Jhonlin – ah, not so little now! As tall and as broad of shoulder as his father ever was, with silver threaded into his golden beard, and a little pillow of belly riding soft behind his belt-buckle! – who comforts my days now, bringing me tea by the fire and hot possets at bedtime, Jhonlin who married a bright and pretty wife who blessed me with five fine grandchildren, Jhonlin who tends the fields and the flocks, puts food on the table and money in the strongbox. Jhonlin, a brave and loving lad grown to be a brave and loving man, who, as the years turn, likes to hold my hand as I rock and remember before the fire, silent as his father was, but content with his lot, and smiling more than his father ever could.

We never speak of it, Jhonlin and I, as my Jhon never spoke of what had happened that night at the crossroads by the Holi Stone. My daughters and my daughter-of-love know nothing, the neighbours know nothing, and the grandchildren have other stories to beg for at bedtime. I tell this tale now only because I know, and Jhonlin knows, that soon the year will come turning for me one last time. I feel it in the grip of his hand as I rock before the bright fire, and – Lady forgive us! – I know that we did right, that night, he and I. We did right.

So let us go guiltless into Her embrace, with no forsaken woman's vengeful spirit forbidding us the Gate! But just in case, just to be sure, I have asked, and Jhonlin has promised, that I shall be buried with a sharp new steel needle pinning closed the collar of my dress. With that I shall have to be content, and pray the Lady's blessing.

.....

**Lawrence Wilson**

Fig. 1: Vladyslava Bondar.  
© Olha Holichenko.



# Kupala Brighton: Exploring a Ukrainian Midsummer Festival in an English City

Marek Kohn and Vladyslava Bondar

‘**F**rom my childhood I remember the three most important events of the year,’ says Lesia Kyrylenko, who grew up in central Ukraine: ‘Christmas in the winter, Easter in spring, and Ivana Kupala in the summer.’<sup>1</sup> Now held in a Brighton park, the midsummer Kupala festival has become one of the most important events in the calendar of the new Ukrainian community that formed in Sussex after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Warmly embraced and creatively reworked, Kupala’s traditions are a powerful resource for sustaining the community and enabling it to tell its stories.

Kupala is part of a midsummer festival tradition that manifests in similar forms all across Europe, and over a period of time that pre-dates the full ascendancy of Christianity. People light bonfires on the longest day at gatherings from Portugal and Ireland to Estonia and Greece. In the fourth century CE, according to the martyr St Vincent, pagans in southwestern France would set light to a wheel and roll it down a hill to a river.<sup>2</sup> In 21st-century Ukraine, Lesia Kyrylenko and her neighbours would set car tyres on fire and send them tumbling down a hill, ‘like a symbol of the sun’.

Bonfires and burning wheels are not a feature of Kupala in Brighton, where the celebrations have to comply with park rules and municipal safety regulations. Nor is there any open water, apart from a small ornamental pond. But even though the two fundamental symbolic elements of fire and water are unavailable, the site has become part of the festival’s character. There are hints of the home landscape. Preston Park is on a hillside, crowned by a fringe of woodland that serves to evoke Kupala’s natural habitat in the Ukrainian countryside – and at the base of the valley, underneath the London road, there is a ‘lost’ subterranean river. But the site’s greatest emotional significance is that the first Kupala celebration there, in July 2022, was also the first major occasion at which Ukrainians who had reached Sussex in the preceding months came together as a new community.

Figs 2 and 3: (top and bottom left) Kupala in Preston Park, Brighton, July 2023.  
© Manal Gharzeddin.





Fig. 3: Mara, goddess of death, played by Valerie Zabashta, and Mavka, the forest spirit, played by Bohdana Storozuk.  
© Anastasiia Bohdanova.



Fig. 4: Kira Makogon, Chair of the Stand for Ukraine Brighton & Hove community group.  
© Anastasiia Bohdanova.

The Kupala the Ukrainians created was a mixture of traditions recalled from the different parts of the country they came from, adapted both to the new setting and the traumatic situation in which they now found themselves. Much of the lore and the rituals would have looked familiar to the peasants described by the author of the 17th-century *Gustyn Chronicle*, probably based near Chernihiv in northern Ukraine, who identified the figure of Kupalo as a pagan god – and thus, in Christian eyes, a demon:

The commemoration of this demon Kupalo is still being celebrated in some of our lands by the foolish ... in the evening, the plain folk of both sexes come together, and they wind wreaths from edible herbs or roots. When they have wound the herbs around themselves, they light a fire. In another place, they erect a green branch and, holding hands, they circle around this fire, singing their songs in which Kupalo is mentioned. Then they jump over the aforesaid fire, dedicating themselves to this demon.<sup>3</sup>

Several hundred years later, Lesia Kyrylenko describes picking flowers on the morning of the festival, making them into wreaths, decorating a willow branch, dancing in a circle and singing Kupala songs.

The Christian frustration evident in the chronicler's account of the ritual illustrates one of the features of Kupala that has made it so appealing to Ukrainian communities at very different moments in history. It was given a Christian name, Ivana Kupala – Ivan, or John, is St John the Baptist, whose feast day falls around the time of the summer solstice – but the festival is Christian in name only. Nor was it ever a proper Soviet festival, although the authorities in the USSR did try to reinvent it as a celebration of agriculture. Natalie Kononenko, a scholar of Ukrainian folklore, argued in the early 2000s that its absence from church control and Soviet calendars made it a 'space outside all systems where alternative identities are explored'. After Ukraine became independent in 1991, Kupala 'became and has remained popular because it was one of the rituals through which Ukrainians ... began carving out a non-Soviet space and establishing a non-Soviet identity'.<sup>4</sup> For the new Ukrainian community in Sussex, one of Kupala's roles is to sustain Ukrainian identity in a space safe from the Russian aggressor that denies Ukraine has an identity of its own.

Kupala in Brighton also reflects the identity of the community itself, shaped by the war. Ukrainian refugees are nearly all women and children, as men are barred (with limited exceptions) from leaving the country in case they are required to serve in the defence forces. That has sidelined one of Kupala's main traditional themes, young

Fig. 5: The Kupala 2023 drama  
(right: director/performer  
Anastasiia Bohdanova).  
© Manal Gharzeddin.



Fig. 6: Yuliia Poliakova serves  
Ukrainian food at Kupala in 2023.  
© Best Foot Music.



Fig. 7: Rusalka, the river spirit  
played by Violetta Korbina.  
© Marek Kohn.



Fig. 8: Lesia Kyrilenko and  
her daughter Viktoriia.  
© Maryna Litvinova.



unmarried women's search for husbands. On the night of Kupala they would go to a river, take off the flower-crowns they wore on their heads, and place the wreaths upon the water. If a woman's wreath was carried to the far bank, that would be where she would find her husband; if it stayed where it was, the time for her to marry had not yet come ... and if it sank, her current attachment would not last.

That particular tradition is completely absent from Kupala in Brighton: not only is there no river, but the theme of courtship risks being painful when men are far away, many of them fighting at the front. Nor, perhaps, does the quest for husbands fit especially well with the aspirations of the young women who devise and enact the Kupala rituals in Brighton. Instead, the symbols are used to bring together the community as a whole. Everybody joins in making the flower-crowns, known as *vinochky*, which are no longer restricted to young unmarried women. While some married women uphold tradition by not wearing them, others do – and so do one or two men.

This represents a subtle but significant difference between Kupala in Brighton and a trend that emerged in post-independence Ukrainian Ivana Kupala celebrations, in which modernisation diluted the folklore and turned the festivals into more generic summer party gatherings. Brighton's Kupala is modern, combining old folk songs with contemporary ones performed to pre-recorded backing tracks, but the modern songs draw on traditional forms, and support the traditions instead of supplanting them.

Relaxing the rules about who should wear *vinochky* makes the wreaths a more familiar element of Kupala, shared by a larger number of its participants, and thus helps to maintain them as a symbol. In Brighton, modernisation works to reinvent and reinvigorate Kupala, shaping it to serve the needs of the present moment.

At the 2023 Kupala, the key to that reshaping was the most intensely magical element of Kupala, the fern flower. This imaginary bloom is said to appear during the night of Kupala, and if anyone is fortunate enough to find it, they can make a wish that will come true. It became the pivotal device in a drama piece created by Anastasiia Bohdanova, the community's theatre director. The play wove Kupala themes into a narrative that set the festival into its contemporary context and addressed the question that hangs over it today: what is the place of a celebration in wartime?

The story began with three young women singing songs about love and finding a partner. They go to *vechornytsi*, courtship gatherings held in autumn and winter. In the past, these were usually hosted by an older woman in her home; nowadays the modern versions are held in venues such as community centres. It's at such a gathering that a young man, Ivanko, confesses his feelings for one of the women, Marichka. He proposes marriage, but then a war starts – which one is not specified, because it alludes to Ukraine's long history of wars, but his camouflage jacket points to the present conflict.

Kupala comes around; he is at the front, and she protests to the people around her that they can't sing and dance while a war is going on. They reply that the rituals are for keeping their traditions alive, not for having a party. Supported by her community, Marichka joins in with the preparations for Kupala, despite her feelings. Then she meets a widow who tells her she understands what she is going through, and points out that her fiancé may not yet be lost. Marichka sets out to find the fern flower, so that she can make a wish for his return. She finds it, makes the wish, and turns round to see Ivanko there, alive, together with other soldiers back safe from the frontline.

The couple wed, and the community celebrates, in a reworked version of the Kupala bonfire tradition. According to Kupala lore, if partners manage to keep holding hands as they jump the bonfire, they will stay together. In the Brighton celebration, the bonfire was symbolised by bands of red cloth, shaken to represent flames. The bride and groom held one of the bands between them, a little like a guard of honour, and the crowd jumped through in mixed-up pairs – adults, children, friends – rather than couples. It promised that the Ukrainian community would stay together, across generations: much of the impetus that helped bring Kupala to Brighton came from parents who wanted their children to know and practise Ukrainian culture, even though some of them had previously had little interest in the traditions themselves. Some had little experience of them either, having grown up in places where Ukrainian customs were not observed; they now welcomed the opportunity to learn the songs and dances for themselves.

It was also an act that helped to create a wider community. When Ukrainians jumped the 'bonfire' with their new local friends from Britain and other countries, it had the same symbolic meaning as when couples jumped real bonfires in Ukraine: that the relationship between them would be strong and enduring. One of the main reasons for holding a Kupala celebration in Brighton was that it offered a way to thank local people for their support, by sharing Ukrainian culture with them.

There was a fern flower quest in the woods for the children too, and everybody present was encouraged to make a wish while tying a ribbon to the *hilechko*, the decorated branch which is traditionally burned as a symbolic sacrifice. (In 2022, the custom was upheld by burning the *hilechko* in a brazier on Brighton's beach a couple of days later.) The fern flower is a symbol of hope – and a reminder that if a Ukrainian really found such a flower, there would be no question about what their wish would be. It is also an appeal to magic, echoed by the children's quest and the wish-tree, the reasons for which are tragically obvious. The Sunday afternoon gathering among the Preston Park trees was a ritual of collective self-enchancement, telling a magical story about hope and togetherness.

Not all the traditional characters took part. Effigies of Kupalo, the male figure identified by the 17th-century chronicler as a demon, often play the role of sacrificial

object that is assigned to the *hilechko* branch in Brighton. Kupalo did not feature, and neither did Marena, a female figure that plays a similar role in the midsummer rituals. Other supernatural beings were there, though: two restless female nature spirits and a goddess. Playing the role of a *rusalka* river spirit, Violetta Korbina explained that such beings are the unquiet souls of women or girls, whose lives or fates left them caught between the world of the dead and the world of the living.<sup>5</sup> *Rusalka* is an unpredictable and potentially dangerous being, as is her forest counterpart, *Mavka*. The third of the trio, *Mara*, is a goddess of death.

*Rusalka* is known beyond the Slavic world as the central character of the opera of the same name by the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák, first performed in 1901. She also appears in a celebrated work written ten years later by Lesia Ukrainka, a major figure in 20th-century Ukrainian literature, 'The Forest Song' (the author's surname is a *nom de plume*; it means 'Ukrainian woman'). This fairy drama about the doomed love between the forest spirit *Mavka* and a young man is widely regarded as the founding text of Ukrainian fantasy literature, and is a poetic meditation on the relationship between humankind and the natural world.

At the Kupala festival, the spirit figures played a sharply different role in reflections on the effects of human actions upon nature. The three characters stationed themselves in front of information panels that took visitors from the folkloric elements of Kupala to the impact of Russian aggression on Ukraine's culture, people and environment. As a water spirit, *Rusalka* was given the task of talking about the flooding caused by the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam a month previously. The inseparability of tradition, history, culture, and the current war is a feature of all the Ukrainians' performances and presentations in Sussex. They are constantly striving to find ways to communicate with the larger communities of which they have become part – including addressing them in the guise of supernatural beings from Ukrainian folklore. The most pressing reason is the need to raise funds to support Ukraine, but their efforts also express the strength of their desire to talk about who they are and why they are here.

Kupala itself may become more closely integrated with its new cultural landscape. In Brighton it has been celebrated at the point that has become traditional in the Ukrainian calendar, around 6 or 7 July, putting it at a remove from British and other European midsummer festivals. Ivana Kupala became displaced from the summer solstice through its nominal Christianisation, by which it became tied to the Old Style calendar used by eastern Orthodox churches. In the face of Russia's imperialistic insistence that Ukraine is not an authentic nation, the old system of dates looks like a Russian frame that distorts Ukraine's symbolic calendar. Brighton's Kupala may follow Ukraine's Christmas, which in 2023 was officially detached from the traditional date of 7 January and moved to 25 December – a symbolic move towards integration with

the rest of Europe. Realigning Kupala with midsummer will make it easier for the festival to be seen, and practised, as part of a shared cultural tradition. As with folk music, there are rich opportunities for intercultural exchange; not just with British folkloric traditions, but also those of other communities who celebrate midsummer and have a presence in England.

Looking at Kupala from two different but strongly compatible perspectives, Ukrainian and Anglo-Polish, while participating in it at very different levels – leading organiser and local volunteer helper – we see many other possibilities in it. Our Kupala Brighton project aims to use the Brighton Kupala festival as a focus and a point of departure for an exploration of the role of traditional culture in contemporary Ukrainian society, both among refugees and in the homeland – an exploration that will offer striking perspectives on culture and identity across Europe in general. It also aims to develop exchanges beyond the festival itself, with writers, arts practitioners and academics. If it's successful, it will lead to insights, analyses and reflective commentaries. But it will remain the product of a shared enchantment, with the flowers, the songs, the spirits and the conjured sense of place that cast a midsummer spell over an English city park.

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## Marek Kohn and Vladyslava Bondar

### Notes

1. 'Lesia's Kupala', Kupala Brighton website, <https://kupalabrighton.org/lesia.html> (accessed 23 March 2024).
2. Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 311.
3. Ulrich R. Kleinhenkel and Igor O. Klimov, *Herbs and the Evolution of Human Societies*, ed. Yue Yue and Molly Chatalic (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2022), 112; *Збірник Козацьких літописів: Густийський, Самійла Величка. Грабівки / упоряд. та переклад: В. Крехотень, В. Шевчук, Р. Іванченко* (Х. : Дніпро, 2006), 976 с.
4. Natalie Kononenko, 'Karaoke Ivan Kupalo: Ritual in Post-Soviet Ukraine', *Slavic and East European Journal* (2004), 48 (2): 177–202.
5. 'Rusalka', Kupala Brighton website, <https://kupalabrighton.org/rusalka.html> (accessed 23 March 2024).

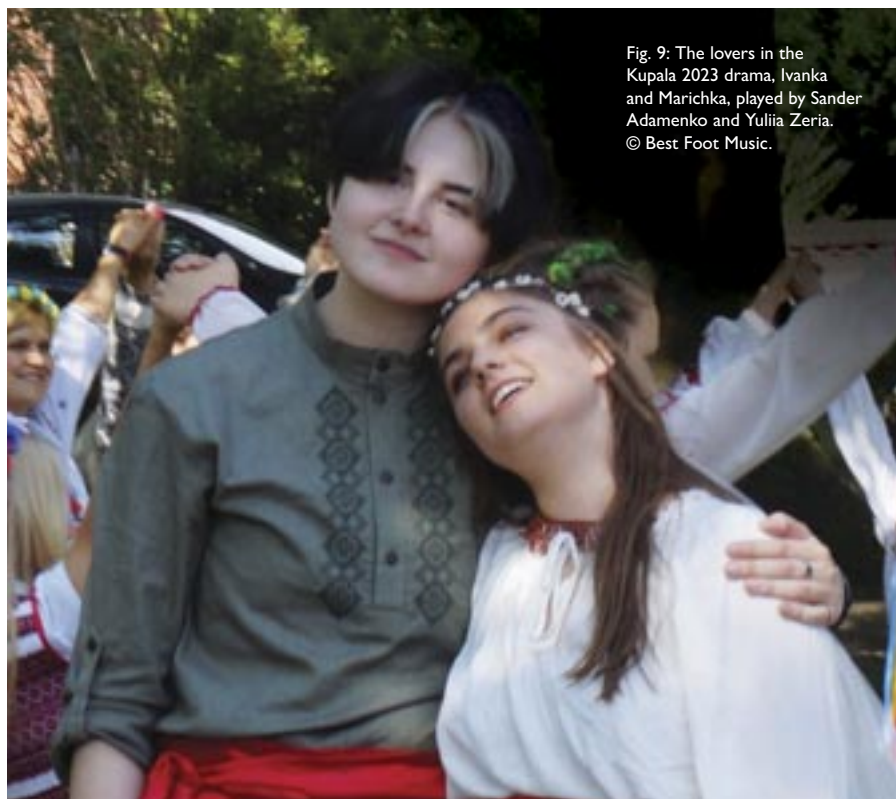


Fig. 9: The lovers in the Kupala 2023 drama, Ivanka and Marichka, played by Sander Adamenko and Yuliia Zeria.  
© Best Foot Music.



Fig. 10 Hanging ribbons on the hilechko and making wishes.  
© Best Foot Music.



*A review of*  
**Angela Carter's  
Pyrotechnics:  
A Union of Contraries**

Kirill Melnikov

**A**ngela Carter's *Pyrotechnics: A Union of Contraries* is a collection of essays that seeks to highlight and study the explosive beauty of Angela Carter's fiction as various media and art forms, visual and sound devices, material objects and points of view converge in a single firework-like blast in which every spark becomes a piece of a complex pattern.

The volume is composed of four parts that tackle different aspects of Carter's writing: the first one provides insight into the relationship between signs and objects found in her works; the second explores the musical and performative aspects of her fairy-tale narratives; the third part tackles the various visual devices she employs throughout her career; and, finally, the fourth part draws attention to the striking materiality of Carter's culinary and corporeal depictions.

The collection's introduction is written by its editors, Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Charlotte Crofts, who highlight Carter's use of explosive metaphors that enchant and captivate her readers while representing the disruption of the existing social and political systems. Recalling Carter's interest in the foreign words *hanabi* and *feux d'artifice* ('fireworks' in Japanese and French), the editors employ both the Eastern and Western pyrotechnic practices as their conceptual framework to re-appraise Carter's literary craftsmanship fuelled by her fiery inventiveness.

The first part of the collection opens with Natsumi Ikoma's exploration of how Angela Carter's stay in Japan highlighted her ability to grasp and interpret the different 'signs' on a purely visual level, leading her to perceiving that ideas and expectations hold precedence over real individuals in Japanese lifestyle and to a realisation that such precedence is not foreign to her. Ikoma then establishes a connection between Japanese art forms like the *bunraku* puppet theatre and *irezumi* tattoos and Carter's fiction, showing the British writer's confrontation with her own Orientalist attitudes as well as her development as a feminist. This is followed by David Punter's analysis of signs and art in Carter's *Love* (1971), in which Annabel, a young woman who sees the world from an 'expressionist' point of view, is drained of life by her own encroaching mythic images of objects, the ever-

increasing detachment from the world around her resulting in a radical alienation that characterises the novel's psychopathology.

The second part of the collection focuses on the performativity of Angela Carter's writing as well as on its musicality, opening with Polly Paulusma's piece in which she talks about Carter's fascination with the traditional folk music genre. Paulusma guides her readers through a wealth of evidence such as Carter's vinyls, notations, notebooks, essays, and articles, showing that folk music was always a big part of Carter's life. Paulusma then highlights the integration of folk music elements in Carter's fiction, underlining her use of recurring figures and motifs of folk songs (most notably the greenwood locus), but also the presence of folk-related audial elements that account for the distinctive musicality of Carter's texts. The next chapter features Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère's uncovering of a previously unexplored intertext to 'The Bloody Chamber' and 'The Tiger's Bride'. She shows how the experience of translating Perrault's fairy tales has shaped Carter's perception of this genre, pointing out the connection between those two short stories and Perrault's 'La Marquise de Salusses ou la Patience de Griselidis' ('Griselada' in English), with all three narratives portraying a despotic aristocrat of a husband attempting to condition his wife into submission, but each tale achieving a different effect. The final chapter of this part brings to light yet another hidden intertext to *The Bloody Chamber*, with Ashley Riggs demonstrating how Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* echoes throughout this famous short story collection. Pain and pleasure, subjugation and martyrdom, disembodied voices and voiceless bodies all constitute a part of the inter-centurial critical dialogue between the German composer and the British writer in an explosive display of radical transformations in music and literature.

The penultimate part of the collection delves into the visual aspect of Carter's writing, opening with Belinda Locke's comparative case study of two Australian theatrical adaptations of Carter's short stories. The eloquent language riddled with metaphors and symbolism, the many references to music, the mesmerising descriptions of the narrative's world all pose a challenge to adapting the two stories for stage, and Locke's detailed study highlights some of the creative choices the directors had to face as they took on a task of translating Carter's purple prose into intense visual performances. Scott A. Dimovitz then follows up with an inspection of the surrealist apocalypticism in Carter's works, arguing that her engagement with this genre stemmed from the fear of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War period. Dimovitz uses Carter's interviews, notes, footnotes, and scribbles in margins to show how her emotions towards the potential apocalypse shifted between fear, anger, hope, resignation and more, her fiction reflecting these different attitudes and allowing her to explore the post-apocalyptic Year One. Caleb Sivyver's chapter

comes next, featuring a comprehensive examination of the many optical devices in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. Devices such as kaleidoscopes, daguerreotypes, stereoscopes, and peep-shows, to name a few, enable the protagonist of the novel to assume the patriarchal position of the sovereign spectator, the novel thus exposing the dominant optical regime. This part is concluded with Béatrice Bijon's chapter that proposes an anamorphic approach to reading Carter's work, creating a conversation between the British writer and the surrealist painter Paula Rego. Both women, Bijon shows, create highly disturbing scenes, displacing their readers' and viewers' gaze while forcing them to confront the most disconcerting forms of familial relationships.

The final part of the collection begins with Maria José Pires's mouthwatering description of the two Carter-inspired gastronomic events that took place in May 2017 and allowed for multi-sensory and immersive experiences, highlighting the culinary features of Carter's writing. Carys Crossen's chapter then explores the function of clothing and lack thereof in several of Carter's texts, suggesting that human identity is a performance in itself, with some of her characters preferring to abandon their humanity altogether rather than spend their lives playing a role. Finally, Zoe Brennan closes the collection as she looks at Carter's *Wise Children*, examining the way the Chance sisters resist the ageist dominant discourses by remaining sexually active, publicly visible thanks to their make-up and clothing, and by adopting their nephew's children, thus continuing to be involved in their family's affairs.

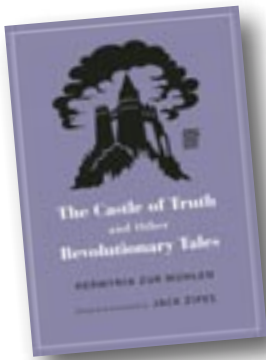
This truly pyrotechnic book brings together various qualities of Angela Carter's fiction, exploring its musicality, materiality, performativity, and its visual aspects in a firework-like explosion, and showcasing the intricate web of references, influences and intertexts hidden in her fiction. Assembling chapters by scholars of different disciplines from all over the world, this collection provides new and insightful ways of reading Carter that will undoubtedly interest both her longtime fans and readers who have only just discovered her.

Editors: Charlotte Crofts and Marie Mulvey-Roberts.

Publisher: Bloomsbury (2022), 258 pp.

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**Kirill Melnikov**



# *A review of* **The Castle of Truth and Other Revolutionary Tales**

B.C. Kennedy

**J**ack Zipes has edited and translated this collection of radical political fairy tales by Hermynia Zur Mühlen (1883-1951) – some translated from German into English for the first time. With an extensive and formative introduction by Zipes and period illustrations by George Grosz, John Heathfield, Heinrich Vogeler and Karl Holtz, *The Castle of Truth and Other Revolutionary Tales* revives the legacy of one of the 20th century's best authors of this genre.

Hermynia Zur Mühlen was an unconventional figure. Disobeying all the rules that were part of her Austrian aristocratic upbringing, she 'betrayed' her class and became one of the most outspoken and prolific left-wing authors of the early 20th century, seeking to revolutionise children and adults through her provocative fairy tales. Forbidden by her father to become a schoolteacher, she married an Estonian count against her parents' will in a desperate attempt to become independent from her family. Following nine unhappy years and ill health, Zur Mühlen moved to Davos in Switzerland, where she flourished. There she met Stefan Klein, an Austrian translator who shared her political views and interests in literature and became her lifelong partner.

Zur Mühlen was particularly excited by the October Revolution (1917), and it was around this time that she began to reflect and write about the trivial and demeaning literature for girls and how children's literature played an important role in the socialisation of young people. This was part of a growing movement in Europe, and she was not alone in reinvigorating the fairy tale with socialist and communist cultural ethics; in France, for example, Paul Vaillant-Couturier's *Jean sans Pain* (1921) was written for children to 'know more about social injustice and the people and forces that produced wars'.

Zur Mühlen's first major pioneering work was in the realm of fairy tales. In 1921 she published *What Little Peter's Friends Told Him*, using six different household objects that come to life to tell Peter's stories of the difficult lives of working-class people. Peter had broken his leg and had to remain alone at home while his mother worked in a factory. Compared to the tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Hans Christian Anderson, who also created talking objects, Zur

Mühlen was much more explicit in relating the objects to the exploitation of workers. Three of these stories make up the opening tale of this present compilation of 17 tales. While the tales are written in a simple, direct style to provide hope, the accompanying pointed and often bleak pen-and-ink drawings by Grosz serve to remind readers that better times are not around the corner.

Zur Mühlen's book became an immediate success and was translated into 10 foreign languages. She continued her experiments with politicising the fairy tale by publishing several other books that dealt with social injustice, discrimination, tyranny, deception, and the significance of solidarity among members of the working class, all themes prevalent in this collection.

However, her world kept changing. When the Nazis took over the German government in 1933, Zur Mühlen and Klein left Frankfurt for Vienna. Following the annexation and occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Kleins – now married – emigrated to England in 1939 where Zur Mühlen remained until her death in 1951.

There was a major change in Zur Mühlen's ideology during the 1930s and 1940s. Where she had formally placed her faith in the Communist Party to spearhead the way to a socialist future, she now placed her faith in religion, and this is reflected in her later writings which place a greater focus on spiritual belief. The fairy tales selected for publication in this book stem primarily from Zur Mühlen's radical Weimar years and are intended to provide a comprehensive view of the innovative techniques that she used in her tales to provoke and raise the political consciousness of her readers. In contrast to classical fairy tales, her focus was constantly on the plight of the working class under capitalist conditions that had to be changed to create greater social justice.

Perhaps the most significant of the tales is 'The Castle of Truth' with its strong autobiographical element. In this tale a beautiful young woman from the working class is exposed to the rays of truth from an indestructible castle and consequently she realises how brutal the elite class is and that she has made a mistake by marrying a wealthy baron. When she relates her experiences to his upper-class friends, who are like sinister beasts, she is sent to an insane asylum. However, the castle becomes a beacon of true light that exposes the criminality of the ruling class. Typical of all the tales in this collection is the open ending. Zur Mühlen did not believe in the happy ending of classical fairy tales. The endings are intended to provoke and incite readers to political action. In 'The Glasses', readers are encouraged to rip off the glasses that blind them from the truth. In 'The Servant', readers learn that they must share the means of production – that is, the machines – to serve the people and not just the ruling class.

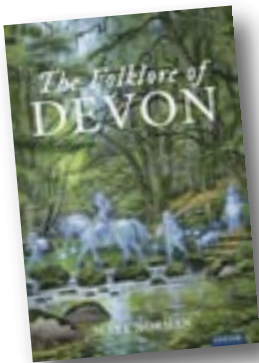
In 'The Carriage Horse', the workhorses organise a union to resist exploitation and bad living conditions, and in 'The Broom' a young worker learns how to sweep away injustice with a magic broom. Zur Mühlen does not mince her words, just as another of the illustrators, Karl Holtz, does not hold back from depicting the devastating conditions under which many people lived and suffered in the Weimar Republic. Perhaps the most moving tale is 'The Red Flag', named not because of its association with the Russian revolution but because it is the flag

soaked in the blood of murdered refugees on an island ruled by a tyrant. It is this flag that unites different groups of exploited refugees to realise how much they have in common and to rebel. This was a tale written when Zur Mühlen was losing faith in the Communist Party and when Nazism was on the rise in Germany. She did not rewrite or modernise fairy tales such as 'Little Red Riding Hood' to explain to her readers how to combat fascism. There are no princesses or princes in her tales or happy weddings. The sources of her stories were the injustices that she viewed throughout Europe and the courage of people deprived of humane living conditions. It is striking to see in Zur Mühlen's unusual fairy tales how much she valued international co-operation of working people as the basis for the eradication of injustice and class systems. We are indebted to Professor Zipes' scholarly translation of these tales for reawakening the superb legacy of Hermynia Zur Mühlen's work.

Author: Hermynia Zur Mühlen. Editor and translator: Jack Zipes.  
Publisher: Princeton University Press (2020), 186 pp.

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**B.C. Kennedy**



*A review of*  
**The Folklore  
of Devon**

B.C. Kennedy

**T**here is a misapprehension that Devon is especially rich in folklore, but this is not the case, Mark Norman informs us, when compared to other counties in the United Kingdom which are equally full of superstition, tradition and customs, both ancient and modern. However, where Devon excels is how much of its folklore has been recorded and preserved, a practice that continues through the Devonshire Association (founded in 1862), which holds what is thought to be the most valuable collection of folklore in the county today. It is from these records, the author acknowledges, that he draws extensively in certain chapters of this book. The preservation of customs

and traditions across Devon are found in books such as Ralph Whitlock's *The Folklore of Devon* (1977), and by using this self-same title, the author argues that this present book can be considered as 'an expanse of and update to the ethos of Whitlock's smaller book'. I would have preferred an alternative title to distinguish clearly from the original text and to reflect the new subject matter that Norman explores, particularly in his final chapter, 'Modern Folklore', which aims to show how the constant reinvention of folklore continues in our global, technological modern world.

The term 'folklore', coined in 1846 by antiquarian William Thomas, refers to the collected beliefs, customs, and traditions of any community. It has long been the case that customs and superstition are seen as being confined to the uneducated rural classes or the peasantry, an idea propagated by the upper-class Victorian and Edwardian prolific collectors of folktales, fairy stories and diverse curiosities. Nothing could be further from the truth, Norman argues, as 'the placing of the peasantry as sole arbiters of local folklore was misguided'. Indeed, he suggests, those same collectors interacted with the subject themselves and in doing so created new traditions.

*The Folklore of Devon* is organised into ten chapters, beginning with an account of key folklore collectors who played a significant part in the collection and preservation of folklore material in Devon. The remainder of the book examines the main themes which run through Devon's customs, traditions and beliefs and looks at how they compare with broader examples of folklore in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Devon has a geographical area of approximately 2,589 square miles. Just under 25 percent of this consists of the Dartmoor and Exmoor moorlands. Both these areas bear evidence of human habitation as far back as the Mesolithic periods, and it is no surprise that many folklore stories are attached to these two areas, such as supernatural animals – think of the 'Beast of Exmoor' – legendary characters, wild ghostly hunts and spirits believed to haunt these vast wildernesses. Sometimes it is aspects of the landscape itself, such as water, that take on an identity in folktales. Dartmoor takes its name from the main river which flows through it, the river Dart, which was believed to 'cry'. It was believed that the Dart claims a human soul every year, stemming from old ideas of river deities and sacrifice. However, this superstition is not confined to the Dart, as Norman points out: the idea of rivers requiring one or more souls a year is prevalent throughout the United Kingdom and internationally.

Chapter Three focuses on the calendar customs that play an important role in the largely agricultural environment of Devon, which relate directly to the passing cycle of the year and may be considered as part of the intrinsic cultural makeup of the county. Because Devon is predominantly an agricultural country, the following chapter concentrates on the varied folk beliefs attached to agricultural production, and by association, to the prediction of favourable weather conditions required to undertake them. The author explores several superstitious Devonian beliefs, many of which are now quite obscure, and considers whether, in some cases, there could be a valid meteorological basis.

You don't have to look far in Devon to find traces of legendary visitations by the Devil in the landscape; for example, significant rocks and stones which seem out of place were usually thought to be the work of Satan. In this chapter, Norman urges the use of extreme caution to avoid jumping to conclusions when looking for historical clues within folkloric place names. While there are obvious religious connotations to many Devil stories, there are also comedic tales of him being outwitted by humble villagers. Chapters six to nine focus on specific areas of legend and myth including fairies, witchcraft and hauntings that share many of the common motifs such as changelings, scapegoating, pixy-leading and horse stealing. Norman suggests that the stories of fairies stealing horses at night and riding them hard on the moors may have their origin in the smuggling community as an explanation for why horses 'borrowed' from local owners overnight to move goods appeared exhausted and dishevelled in the morning.

Sightings of ghostly Black Dogs are a worldwide phenomenon, but are most prevalent in the United Kingdom, where virtually every variation may be found. Possibly the most well-known is the Devon-based *Hound of the Baskervilles* from the Sherlock Holmes stories. In Chapter Eight Norman uses this story as a springboard to explore the folklore surrounding the Black Dog as a portent of death, a diabolic version of the devil or as a protective companion. He suggests that some of the folklore sprang from stories invented by smugglers to keep people away from the places in which they were operating, particularly in coastal areas, but at the same time those smugglers also drew on pre-existing folklore when coming up with stories.

The book closes with a chapter on modern folklore. Norman argues that there is a common misconception that folklore relates only to old practices and traditions and has no real relevance to modern life. The internet, he suggests, is creating folklore every day. Described as 'the world's largest unintentional folklore archive', the internet is constantly providing a platform to record and preserve the way that people work within their cultural norms, for example through the making or sharing of internet memes. Folklore not only defines those things that we classify as old and part of a superstitious past. We are, Norman writes, a species that thrives on telling stories. This book provides a comprehensive updated volume of Devonian folklore and is clearly aimed at being the successor of Whitlock's 1977 volume, at a time of a resurgence of interest in folklore in the 21st century.

Author: Mark Norman.

Publisher: University of Exeter Press (2023), 228 pp.

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**B.C. Kennedy**



*A review of*  
**Paths in the Snow:  
A Literary  
Journey through  
*The Lion, The Witch and  
The Wardrobe***

Katherine Langrish

When we encounter a Classical faun, an ice-witch, talking animals and Father Christmas in the same story, we can either write it off as a flaw or minor quirk of the author, or we can explore what it means to have placed those disparate figures within the same fictional landscape. (11)

*Paths in the Snow* is an indepth reading of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* which examines the ways in which the Narnia stories function as literature. As Assistant Professor of Literature at the University of Nottingham and a Reader in the Church of England, the author is well placed to recognise and discuss the layered complexity of Lewis's innumerable allusions, theological, literary and contemporary. The genesis of this book was a weekly online discussion group set up by Bloomfield for parishioners during lockdown; he chose *The Lion* as a text likely to be familiar to most of them. A year or two later this evolved into a regular reading group for his students at university. 'Some were Christians, some were not. The weekly discussions took us down lines of thought I could not have anticipated.' (9)

The result is a fascinating and eclectic mixture. It's still relatively unusual to find critiques of the Narnia stories which take seriously both their literary and theological elements. Chapter by chapter Bloomfield picks 'details and connections which strike me as worth investigating' (26) and his commentary on these is never less than thought-provoking. An example is his comparison of William Dunbar's 14th-century poem *Done is a Battell on the Dragon Blak*, in which Christ harrows Hell, with the moment Giant Rumblebuffin destroys the White Witch's castle gates. Dunbar writes, 'The yettis of hell ar brokin with a crack' (The gates of hell are broken with a crack): Lewis writes,

'The gates creaked at the first blow, cracked at the second, and shivered at the third.' The reference is clearly deliberate. Each involves a rescue: Christ redeems the prisoners of Hell, and Aslan restores life to the prisoners the Witch had turned to stone.

The book is full of such insights. J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment in Time* – influential in the 1930s, it inspired J.B. Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls* – may have prompted the idea of Narnian time running differently to that of our world. Edmund's greedy desire for Turkish Delight is linked to the scarcity of sweetmeats during wartime and post-war rationing. Via a 1947 translation of the *Epistle to the Romans*, we learn why shaking hands could be understood as a sign of forgiveness. We consider differences between the faun Mr Tumnus and Pan of *The Wind in the Willows*, and discover Pentecostal references in the moment when Aslan breathes on the White Witch's statues. There is even a comparison between Lucy's meeting with Mr Tumnus, and Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* – though *The Tale of Mrs Tiggly-Winkle* is an even closer fit. Its heroine, little Lucie, drinks tea in the house of hedgehog-cum-washerwoman Mrs Tiggly-Winkle, and like Lucy Pevensie's, her experience is not without a frisson of unease: 'all through [Mrs Tiggly-Winkle's] gown and her cap there were *hair-pins* sticking wrong way out; so that Lucie didn't like to sit too near her'. Though few of these references would be noticed by children, they nevertheless bestow upon the world of Narnia a depth and richness to which, as a child who adored the *Chronicles of Narnia*, I can wholeheartedly testify. And they are there for adult readers to interpret and enjoy.

Some have dismissed the Narnia stories as obvious allegories, blatant Christian propaganda in which, quite simply, Aslan = Jesus. Bloomfield disagrees. 'Lewis's borrowings from the Bible are by no means straightforward, and the artistry with which he selects and interweaves details is a central part of the novel' (25). He shows that even at moments such as the death and resurrection of Aslan, Lewis's narrative often diverges from the Gospel accounts.

Lewis's allusive technique in these chapters is remarkable: he repeatedly seems to make allusions which insist we read the story in terms of the Gospels, and then alters or entirely reverses the expected image. (228)

Whereas Peter and the disciples fall asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane while Jesus prays, Lucy and Susan cannot sleep: they go with the sorrowful Aslan to the Stone Table. When Mary Magdalene meets the risen Jesus at the empty tomb, Jesus warns her, 'Do not touch me' – 'Noli me tangere' in the Latin Bible. When Aslan returns to life, he invites the two girls to play 'catch me if you can' with him and a joyful romp ensues, full of 'the delight and pleasure of the physical' (247).

The turning of the ‘noli me tangere’ into ‘catch me if you can’ is probably the boldest and most outrageous rewriting of an image from the Gospels in these chapters. It follows the same pattern of entirely reworking a significant symbol from the biblical texts, but using it to shape a theological meaning which ... is framed for the emotional world of a young reader. (248)

‘I think it is too simplistic,’ Bloomfield writes, ‘to swap in Jesus’ name for Aslan’s’ (241). Since Aslan has knowledge of the ‘deeper magic before the dawn of time’, he must have existed then, and ‘is the Logos, the Word which begins the Gospel of John’ (242). Aslan is not (at least, not until the dénouement of *The Last Battle*, which as a child I cordially detested) Jesus in disguise. He is at once a great divine power and a lion – a child’s dream, a majestic talking animal whose golden mane you can bury your face in. As Bloomfield reminds us: ‘One meaning does not replace or overwrite the other’ (35).

A thing I particularly like about *Paths in the Snow* is its insistence on the texture of Lewis’s writing. Far from carefully mapping out one-to-one allegorical correspondences, Lewis himself wrote in his essay *Three Ways of Writing for Children* that ‘everything in the story should arise from the whole cast of the author’s mind.’ And so, if Lucy’s passage through a dark wardrobe into the frozen Narnian woods has resonances of the ‘dark wood’ of Dante’s *Inferno*, Bloomfield is clear this need not mean Lewis was conscious of planting such an allusion. He was remarkably well read, and such things sink deep and rise up in other forms. Jem Bloomfield proves himself a reliable, erudite and fascinating guide as we follow him down the twisting Narnian byways, and *Paths in the Snow* is a delightful book.

Author: Jem Bloomfield.

Publisher: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd (2023), 256 pp.

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**Katherine Langrish**



## *A review of* **Teddy, The Little Refugee Mouse**

Sophia Antoni-Burridge

**W**ar causes brutality, cruelty and devastation; it uproots people from the lives they know and love to seek safety among people who might not be welcoming or sympathetic to their circumstances. War plagues our history and creeps along our present.

British artist Dorothy Burroughes, born in London in 1883, originally published *Teddy, The Little Refugee Mouse* in 1942. This short children's novel is set in a time of despair: World War II has erupted in Europe, and Teddy, a little London mouse, must leave his home to find refuge in the countryside. Taken in by a welcoming mouse family on a farm, he has to adapt to his new surroundings. Though things might seem tranquil, there are still challenges. Spitfire, the tabby cat, threatens the safety of Teddy's refuge, and the little mouse must defend the family who so generously took him in.

The story starts with Teddy in his London home, looking at torn pieces of newspaper that are papered over his walls. From their disjointed and torn titles, Teddy imagines that they lead to positive headlines rather than the negative ones that surround wartime. Teddy's character is optimistic, and his act of reimagining shows his eagerness to hope for a better outcome. Even when he leaves his home and enters a world he is not used to, Burroughes created a character who, though he might be scared during the journey, is prepared to adapt to his new surroundings. Using his smart mind and talents with the flute, he mends the divide between the animals on the farm.

The interactions between the characters show how to resolve problems peacefully and highlight a kinder solution than the brutality of wars or battles. In the peaceful countryside setting, there is no subjugation or domination of the characters, who instead lead content lifestyles in co-existence with each other. Burroughes wanted to show that young people could learn much from animals. Her artistic flair brings the children's book to life with both colour and black-and-white illustrations, which encapsulate the scenes and the character's actions. As an author and artist who was empathetic towards animals, Burroughes was compelled to try and capture their dignity through these drawings and paintings. The animals can be seen wearing human clothing from tailored suits to accessories. Insects can also be seen, showing that Burroughes did not exclude or isolate, but brought them all together in gentle harmony.

However, if we look closer at the story and illustrations, they can be interpreted as scenes from the Blitz during the Second World War. The entire farm is in fact a symbol of war itself. The mice represent young, enlisted soldiers, and an umbrella, which Teddy uses to cross from his London home to the farm, represents the ships that carried the soldiers to war. The villainous cat signifies the enemy. Teddy sees other species he's never seen before, like a soldier travelling to a different land. And Burroughes' cleverly drawn letterbox illustrations embody scenes from the trenches where a defence is raised against Spitfire. These metaphors make *Teddy, the Little Refugee Mouse* a great read that is not just aimed toward children, but audiences of all ages.

Teddy's optimistic personality could inspire children to adopt Teddy's inventive way of taking torn newspaper articles and creating imaginative and positive headlines of their own. His open mind makes him an inspirational character and, during his exploration of the countryside, he shows a willingness to learn and accept new things. Along with Teddy, the mouse family are positive role models for children, as they promote kindness to those who seek it, even Spitfire.

Having so far published 9 children's books that have been forgotten over time, Jack Zipes, the editor, says, 'I sniff out significant so-called antique books and breathe new life into them.' His intent in republishing is to 'illustrate how writers and illustrators have used their art to generate hope in their readers.' Though some of the illustrations are slightly misaligned with the writing's pace, this does not detract from the story as a whole. Zipes has added a mission statement at the end of the book, saying, 'I publish books like *Teddy, The Little Refugee Mouse*, books calling for peace and joy, books of the past that have been found, because I too want to imagine a better world, and keep the worst parts of history from repeating themselves.' It is safe to say that Zipes has taken the core elements of this faded children's story to lead us back to this fable, not simply of a heroic mouse and a villainous cat, but of enacting kindness, and helping and accepting those in need during hard times.

Author: Dorothy Burroughes. Editor: Jack Zipes.

Publisher: Little Mole & Honey Bear (2021), 53 pp.

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**Sophia Antoni-Burridge**

# About the contributors

## Dr Paul Quinn

Dr Paul Quinn is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Chichester. He is the Director of the Chichester Centre for Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Speculative Fiction.

## Dr Naomi Foyle

Dr Naomi Foyle is a science fiction novelist, verse dramatist and award-winning poet and essayist. Her cyberchiller *Seoul Survivors*, named by the *Guardian* as 'among the best of recent SF', was followed by *The Gaia Chronicles*, an eco-science fantasy quartet set in a post-fossil fuel Mesopotamia. A non-Muslim Fellow of the Muslim Institute, she is also a Consultant Editor of *Critical Muslim*, and has spoken on Islamic SF at festivals and events including the Bradford Literature Festival and MFest: Festival of Muslim Cultures and Ideas.

## Yseult de Blécourt

Yseult de Blécourt is an historical anthropologist specialising in the study of witchcraft, werewolves and fairy tales in Europe from the Late Middle Ages to the 20th century. She is an independent researcher and an Honorary Research Fellow at the Meertens Institute (Amsterdam). She is one of the editors of the Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic series (together with Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies). Her own books include *Tales of Magic*, *Tales in Print: On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm* (2012), and the edited *Werewolf Histories* (2015). *Werewolf Legends*, an edited volume in collaboration with Mirjam Mencej, has recently appeared. She is also researching werewolf films, with articles in *Contemporary Legend* and *Gramarye*.

## Davood Khazaie

Davood Khazaie was born in Iran in 1973. He finished his elementary and secondary studies in Kermanshah and his BA and MA in Shiraz University. For a decade he was the lecturer of English literature at Persian Gulf University, Bushehr. He has defended his PhD dissertation at Osnabrück University in Germany on the comparative study of some English, Persian and German Folktales. He is also a member of SUCCLS (Shiraz University Center for Children's Literature Studies) in Iran. He has published articles on comparative study of folktales and fairy tales, children's literature, translation studies, Persian classical literature and art and has recently finished the first *Critical Dictionary of Children's Literature in Persian*, including circa 200 essays on keywords of children's literature (forthcoming in 2024). His book, *Human Frailties and Faculties: Social Relationships in English, Persian and German Folktales* appeared in English in 2019.

### **Assunta Vitale**

Assunta Vitale received her PhD in Italian Studies from the University for Foreigners of Siena in September 2022. In November 2022, she published the book *La molteplicità: una categoria barocca per Lo cunto de li cunti* (*Multiplicity: A Baroque category for Lo cunto de li cunti*), the outcome of her doctoral thesis. Since 2018 she has collaborated with the Centro Internazionale di Studi sul Seicento (International Centre for Seventeenth-Century Studies) at the University for Foreigners of Siena and been a member of the research group 'Le accademie toscane del Seicento' (The Tuscan Academies of the Seventeenth Century). Her priority research interests are the literary production of the 17th century and the Tuscan academies of the 17th century.

### **Giulia Depoli**

Giulia Depoli is a PhD student in Italian Studies and Modern Philology at the Scuola Normale Superiore (Pisa, Italy). The aim of her research project is to examine the cultural and narrative models which contributed to the birth of the 15th-century Italian vernacular novella, focusing on three main literary fields: Boccaccio and the late 14th-century Tuscan novella, Christian hagiography and neo-Latin humanist short fiction.

### **Ruth B. Bottigheimer**

Ruth Bottigheimer, Research Professor in the Department of Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies at Stony Brook University, State University of New York, is a leading American scholar of the Grimms' fairy tales. Her recent publications include *Fairy Tales: A New History* (2009), *Gender and Story in South India*, ed. with Lalita Handoo and Leela Prasad (2007), and *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (2002). Past publications include *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* (1996), *Grimm's Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales* (1987), and *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*, ed. (1987). Apart from these, she has written numerous articles and chapters in books on diverse topics, including European fairy tales, the history of illustration, and the socialisation of children through Bible narratives. She has also published reviews, encyclopaedia articles and translations, and her languages of research have included English, German, French, and on occasion, Italian and Spanish.

### **Kristin Camitta Zimet**

Kristin Camitta Zimet is the author of a full-length poetry collection, *Take in My Arms the Dark*. She is the editor of *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*. Her poems are in journals around the world. Her new poetry manuscript gives voice to the stories in Torah.

### **Daniel A. Rabuzzi**

Pushcart Prize nominee Daniel A. Rabuzzi (he/his) ([www.danielarabuzzi.com](http://www.danielarabuzzi.com)) has been published in, among others, *Folkeminner* (journal of the Norwegian Folklore Society), *ARV: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*, and *Folklore*. He earned degrees in the study of folklore & mythology and European history, and studied at the University of Oslo's Institute for Folklore Studies, and the University of Bielefeld. He lives in New York City with his artistic partner and spouse, the woodcarver Deborah A. Mills ([www.deborahmillswoodcarving.com](http://www.deborahmillswoodcarving.com)). They watch the crows who nest in the courtyard below their apartment.

### **Fija Callaghan**

Fija Callaghan is a storyteller and poet who has been recognised by a number of awards, including shortlisting for the HG Wells Short Story Prize in 2021. Her writing can be found in publications such as *Seaside Gothic*, *Gingerbread House*, *Howl: New Irish Writing*, and elsewhere, and her debut collection is forthcoming from Neem Tree Press in early 2025. Originally from the Cascadia region, she now lives in Dublin, Ireland with her books.

### **Susan Francino**

Susan Francino holds an MFA in Poetry from Seattle Pacific University and is a PhD student in Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Her poetry and translations have appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *St Katherine Review*, and *Ekstasis*.

### **Sylvie Jane Lewis**

Sylvie Jane Lewis is a fiction writer and poet from Chichester, and recently graduated with an MPhil in English from the University of Cambridge. Her work has placed in literary competitions (winner of the 2023 Cambridge University Poetry Prize, runner-up of the 2023 Sykes Prize) and appeared in various publications. She has worked as an editor for literary journals *Riptide* and *Enigma*. Currently she is working on a first poetry collection and a first novel, both of which have fairy tales as a core source of inspiration.

### **Denisha Naidoo**

Denisha Naidoo is a South African-born BIPOC Canadian physician psychotherapist, poet and writer living in Guelph, Ontario, Canada with her dog Maverick. Her work has appeared in *Amazing Stories*, *PRISM International*, *Passager Books*, *Prairie Fire*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Braided Way* magazine, and *Ladies Briefs: A Short Anthology*. She also published a podcast of her novella *The Amazing Adventures of Wig Girl*.

### **Dr Ella Leith**

Ella Leith is a writer, academic support worker, folklorist, and oral historian, now living in Malta. Originally from the Midlands but with strong ties to Angus, she was immersed in folktales and folksongs from an early age. She studied Scottish Ethnology at the University of Edinburgh, and completed a PhD in 2016 looking at Scottish deaf communities' signed storytelling traditions. Her column 'Foraging Through Folklore' was published in *Herbology News* magazine 2020-22, and she continues to draw on folklore and our ongoing relationships with the past and the natural world in her fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and textile art.

### **Claire Rakich**

Claire Rakich is a folk musician, songwriter, and folklore enthusiast. She performs as one half of trad-folk duo The Claras ([theclaras.com](http://theclaras.com)). A co-founder of the Sark Folk Festival in the Channel Islands, which ran for nine years, she now lives in Brighton with her family. 'The Green Egg' is her first fairy tale.

### **Lawrence Wilson**

Lawrence Wilson's writing has appeared in *Albedo One*, *Agenda*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Best of British*, *The Poetry of Roses*, *The Pocket Poetry Book of Marriage*, *The Pocket Poetry Book of Cricket*, *The Darker Side of Love*, and in other journals and collections.

### **Marek Kohn**

Marek Kohn is a writer based in Brighton. His most recent books are *Four Words for Friend* and *The Stories Old Towns Tell*, both published by Yale University Press.

### **Vladyslava Bondar**

Vladyslava Bondar is the lead organiser of the Kupala festival in Brighton ([kupalabrighton.org](http://kupalabrighton.org)), working with the support group Stand for Ukraine Brighton & Hove. She came to Sussex as a refugee from Ukraine in April 2022, and works in mental health and the refugee support sector.

### **Kirill Melnikov**

Kirill Melnikov is a PhD candidate at the University of Lausanne where he is employed as a doctoral assistant in English and Comparative Literature. He is interested in examining the inter-cultural dialogue between different authors of various time periods through comparative analysis, and his current research focus is on the previously unexplored connection between Angela Carter's fiction and Russian literature of late 19th/early 20th centuries.

### **Dr B.C. Kennedy**

Barbara Kennedy received her PhD from the University of Sussex where she studied the links between music and healing as described in a wide range of 15th-, 16th- and 17th-century literature. She has lectured at the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton where she has taught a range of courses, with texts from the medieval period to today. Barbara has an interest in Irish folklore and fairy tales, including the political applications of fairy tales in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

### **Katherine Langrish**

Katherine Langrish is the author of a number of historical fantasies for children and young adults, including the critically acclaimed trilogy *West of the Moon*, and *Dark Angels* (HarperCollins). She studied medieval literature at University College and Kings College, London. Katherine is the creator of the award-winning blog *Seven Miles of Steel Thistles* which discusses folklore, fairy tales and fantasy, and she was invited in 2022 to give the annual Katharine Briggs Memorial Lecture to the Folklore Society. Her most recent publication is *From Spare Oom to War Drobe: Travels in Narnia with my nine year-old self* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2021).

# Gramarye

The Chichester Centre for Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Speculative Fiction

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# Submission guidelines

Submissions should be sent for consideration as Word .doc or .rtf attachment to the editor ([info@sussexfolktalecentre.org](mailto:info@sussexfolktalecentre.org)).

Critical submissions should be accompanied by a separate file with the title, a 100-word abstract and a brief (100 words) biographical note. Relevant colour image files, along with copyright permission, may also be supplied at this stage.

Creative submissions are invited as follows:

- Short fiction – max. 3000 words (one story or several).
- Poetry – max. four poems to a total of no more than 4 pages/240 lines.
- Long poems, traditional forms, flash fictions and experimental creative writing are all encouraged.

Creative submissions should be accompanied by a separate file with the title, a brief (100 words) biographical note, and, for work that draws on existing fairy tales, folklore, myth or fantastical traditions, a similarly short statement on why you were drawn to do so.

We also invite submissions of original artwork (painting, illustration, photography, other digital media, etc), sent as colour image files, along with a brief (300 words max, artist's statement). Images may be used as a feature section, or to complement critical and creative texts, as per the editors' discretion.

Only original submissions that are not simultaneously under consideration by another journal will be considered. Unrevised student essays or theses cannot be considered. Send queries to the editor at [info@sussexfolktalecentre.org](mailto:info@sussexfolktalecentre.org).

## Peer reviewers

We are grateful to our peer reviewers Dr Sarah Baker, Tia Clifford, Ella Fox, Joanna Geoghegan, Dennis Low, Sabrina Mei-Li Smith, Ashleigh Meikle, Sophie Parkes-Nield, Rebecca Moden, Amanda Rutherford, Charlotte Symons, Fiona Tinker and Lela Tredwell.

If you are interested in becoming a peer reviewer for *Gramarye*, please get in touch with a short CV.

The full call for submissions can be found at [sussexfolktalecentre.org/news](http://sussexfolktalecentre.org/news)



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