Introduction

Straparola and the Other Voice

It might seem strange to readers familiar with the the series The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe to find published among its titles *The Pleasant Nights*: a collection of tales authored, after all, by a man, Giovan Francesco Straparola. And at first glance, Straparola's text appears to be just one of many variations on Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* produced in mid-sixteenth-century Italy. But it is a highly innovative text, for alongside the sort of tales typical of the Boccaccian tradition, we find one of the earliest collections of literary fairy tales printed in a European vernacular language.[1] The sixteen fairy tales in *The Pleasant Nights* include early versions of Puss-in-Boots and Beauty and the Beast, as well as dragon slayer tales. On account of these tales, *The Pleasant Nights* has primarily been studied either as a foundational text of the European literary fairy tale tradition or as a unique example of sixteenth-century Italian tale collections, rather than a specifically feminist or antifeminist work. But as Domna Stanton and Lewis Seifert assert in their volume in this series titled *Enchanted Eloquence*, "Few forms of writing are as closely associated with women and femininity as the fairy tale."[2]

Prior to the publication of the first volume of *The Pleasant Nights* in 1550, fantastic stories about fairies, magic, and monsters like Straparola's had been associated most often with either very young, or very old, unlearned, female narrators. Straparola, however, paints a new portrait of the fairy tale narrator as a witty young woman in an urban salon who is as capable engaging dominant literary traditions as she is spinning fantastic yarns. Furthermore, these talented female narrators and their male interlocutors stage a debate on the status of women that unfolds on the second night of storytelling through an exchange of tales that allows the women to question prevailing gender norms while the men seek to uphold them. In its explicit concern with gender issues, *The Pleasant Nights* resembles other

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1. By "literary fairy tale," I mean tales that were written by an author and have been preserved in manuscripts or print. Admittedly, the line between the literary tale and the oral tale often appears blurred. Like Boccaccio, Straparola depicts himself as a scribe of the tales in his collection, who faithfully copied them down as the characters in his frame tale recounted them. But as Christine A. Jones and Jennifer Schacker note, we should be careful not to take such claims literally: *Marvelous Transformations: An Anthology of Fairy Tales and Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012), 35. As I will show in this introduction, Straparola's tales are not simply transcriptions of oral tales, but are consciously written with an eye toward both prevailing literary traditions and the emerging markets for print. Indeed, Straparola's *The Pleasant Nights* is often heralded as a foundational text in the European tale tradition. See note 37 in this introduction.

2. Lewis C. Seifert and Domna C. Stanton, eds. and trans., *Enchanted Eloquence: Fairy Tales by Seventeenth-Century French Women Writers* (Toronto: Iter and CRRS, 2010), 1.

male-authored texts in this series that participated directly or indirectly in the early modern *querelle des femmes*, or debate on the status of women.[3]

Certainly, many male authors before Straparola had depicted the voices of female narrators and characters in their texts. And indeed at least one of Straparola's contemporaries sought to capitalize on the novelty of women's voices in print by publishing letters he himself had written but attributed to numerous women.[4] Straparola, however, does not simply ventriloquize female voices. He inserts feminized fairy tales into the canonical Boccaccian novella tradition, thus granting this sort of tale some degree of literary legitimacy. At the same time, through *The Pleasant Nights*' frame tale, in which learned ladies and Venetian literati meet to entertain each other with music and storytelling, the fairy tale enters the cultured space of the sixteenth-century Venetian salon. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that Straparola's female narrators and their tales became a model for a generation of French women writers in Parisian salons, who used the fairy tale to interrogate the gender norms of their day. In this way, then, Straparola's fictional female voices can be seen to have inspired actual historical female voices.

And it is for these reasons, that *The Pleasant Nights* earns a place in this series devoted to the "other voice." *The Pleasant Nights*, in fact, represents two different other voices: first, the female voices of the young women in Straparola's frame tale who recount fairy tales; second, an intersexed or hermaphroditic voice, produced when, by grafting the literary fairy tale onto the masculine Boccaccian tradition, Straparola highlights the literary fairy tale as the product of a truly other voice, a voice that, although feminized, is never completely female. The hermaphrodite, in fact, functions as a useful metaphor for thinking about gender and the fairy tale. The fluidity and instability of the hermaphroditic body that challenges categories of gender, reflects the way in which the first collections of early modern Italian fairy tales, as a literary corpus, would similarly straddle gender lines, as male authors engaged the feminized genre. The simultaneous presence of male and female and the inability of one gender to fully cancel or displace the other serves as an apt metaphor for the ways in which male and female voices intertwine in *The Pleasant Nights*.[5]

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3. See, for example, Juan Luis Vives's *The Education of a Christian Woman,* ed. and trans. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Henricus Cornelius Agrippa's *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, ed. and trans. Albert Rabil, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

4. Ortensio Lando published anonymously *Lettere di molte valorose donne* in 1548, an anthology of more than 250 letters allegedly written by and exchanged between women. On this work see Meredith Ray's insightful chapter "Female Impersonations: Ortensio Lando's *Lettere di molte valorose donne,*" in her book *Writing Gender in Women's Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 45–80.

5. For how Straparola's tale of a hermphrodite (13.9) functions as a symbol for his literary project, see the chapter titled "'Con l'uno e l'altro sesso': Gender, Genre, and Monstrosity in Straparola's Frame

From the voiceless Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, who reveals her rape by her brother-in-law to her sister by way of a woven image, to Charles Perrault's Mother Goose, who spins both tales and wool before the hearth, the art of telling tales and the quintessentially female arts of spinning, weaving, and sewing have been inextricably linked in both literary texts and visual culture.[6] Engravings of women spinning both wool and tales beside the hearth, as their female companions and children listen attentively, adorn early modern texts printed across Europe and reinforced this association.[7] Since antiquity, diverse literary texts, theoretical treatises, and visual iconography have represented fairy tales as a feminized genre produced by women and tied to women's work. In fact, even before Straparola wrote his literary fairy tales, his contemporaries associated fairy tales with lower-class female narrators in domestic spaces. Perhaps the two texts most influential in shaping this view were Apuleius's *The Metamorphoses*, also known as *The Golden Ass*, and Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods.*

By the time Straparola penned his tales, Italians were already quite familiar with the details of Apuleius's story of Lucius, a man overly curious about magic and enchantments who is transformed into an ass, suffers horribly at the hands of many masters, returns to human form, and finally finds salvation by dedicating himself to the cult of the gods Isis and Osiris. The tale of Lucius's adventures circulated widely in Latin, was translated by both the epic poet Matteo Maria Boiardo in 1518 and the poet and author Agnolo Firenzuola in 1550, and was a favorite subject for visual depictions, from woodblock prints to frescos.[8] At one point in Apuleius's romance, Lucius the ass finds himself in a robbers' cave and overhears an old woman tell the story of Cupid and Psyche to a distraught young woman, Charite, who has been abducted by the robbers on her wedding day. Scholars of the fairy tale consider Apuleius's story of Cupid and Psyche to be one of the earliest versions of a Beauty and the Beast tale.[9] The context for the recounting of this early fairy tale would become standard: the narrator is an older woman from the

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Tale" in Suzanne Magnanini, *Fairy-Tale Science: Monstrous Generation in the Tales of Straparola and Basile* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 48–69.

6. This is the central argument in Karen E. Rowe's essay "To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale," in *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 53–74.

7. Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994) xiii, xv, 12–25. For more images see also Rowe, "To Spin a Yarn," 66–71.

8. On the popularity of *The Golden Ass* in early modern Italy, see Mariantonietta Acocella's L'asino d'or*o nel Rinascimento: Dai volgarizzamenti alle raffigurazioni pittoriche* (Ravenna: Longo, 2001). For a list of European texts and images inspired by the tale of Cupid and Psyche, see Pasquale Accardo's *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche, Beauty and the Beast, King Kong* (Teaneck, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 50–51.

9. John Stephens, "Apuleius, Lucius (c. 124–c. 170 CE)," in *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, ed. Donald Haase, 3 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 1:54–55.

lower classes who spins her tale for a female public in a domestic setting where men (in this case Lucius in the form of an ass), if present, are relegated to the role of listener, and then eventually elevated to the role of scribe or author, for it is Lucius who recounts what he heard to us through the first-person narrative of the romance. Early modern authors clearly associated Apuleius's text with fairy tales, and his romance became a model for at least one other author of fairy tales, the Franciscan friar Lorenzo Selva. In Selva's own prose romance *The Metamorphosis, Or the Transformations of a Virtuoso* (1582), a first-person narrator who has become a snake due to a witch's curse overhears a number of stories, including three fairy tales that are narrated by an old woman and two young women.[10]

Straparola's contemporaries could read a variation on this depiction of the old crone spinning tales in Boccaccio's *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, a text that was reprinted many times in both Latin and Italian during the sixteenth century. In the final books of *The Genealogy*, Boccaccio mounts a humanist defense of poetry and, more broadly, of all literature as he seeks to justify the study of classical mythology for Christian readers. He argues that we need to remove the fantastic "bark" of fictions in order to arrive at the useful allegorical truths that lie below this surface. In discussing how authors cloak their intentions in these fictions, Boccaccio identifies four different types of fictions: the Aesopian fable, the mythological story, the epic poem, and the tales invented by "crazy old women." Although he initially claims that the tales of these old women hold no truths at all, either literal or figurative, he subsequently will argue that even these old women wish to include some sort of truth in their tales. He writes:

> Not even the craziest old crone keeping vigil around the hearth with the young serving girls and telling some tales about the Ogre, Fairies, and Witches, which have been recited many times feels that she is not including some serious sentiment—to the degree that her feeble intellect permits—with which she wants to frighten the small children, or delight the young ladies, or make fun of the older folks, or at least show the power of Fortune.[11]

10. The first edition, *Della metamorfosi, overo le trasformationi del virtuoso*, was published without the author's permission in Orvieto in 1582. For English translations of these three fairy tales, see my "Between Straparola and Basile: Three Fairy Tales from Lorenzo Selva's *Della metamorfosi* (1582)," *Marvels & Tales* 25, no. 2 (2011): 331–69. I discuss Selva and his tales in greater detail later in this introduction. In his forthcoming boo*k Preserving the Spell: Basile's 'The Tale of Tales' and Its Afterlife in the Fairy Tale Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), Armando Maggi shows that Giambattista Basile divided Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche into smaller narrative episodes, which he then incorporated into a number of different fairy tales in *The Tale of Tales*.

11. "Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* (begun circa 1350)," trans. with notes by Suzanne Magnanini, in *Fairy Tales Framed: Early Forewords, Afterwords, and Critical Words*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 21.

To some extent Boccaccio reproduces here the narrative context for fairy tales that we find in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*: old women recounting tales in a domestic setting to young women, and in this case also to children. While Boccaccio admits that even these female narrators include some "serious sentiment" in their tales, the sort of moral of the story we have come to associate with fairy tales, he clearly places this sort of narration at the bottom of his literary hierarchy and demeans and dismisses their narrators as mentally feeble. In doing so, Boccaccio was following the classical tradition in which "philosophy and rhetoric had to draw a line between poetic narratives and old wives' tales, between the Cyclops and the bogeyman."[12] This distinction hinged upon the belief that old women were unable or unwilling to imbue their tales with an ethically acceptable moral lesson. For this reason, Jan Ziolkowski suggests, when men like Apuleius chose to write the sort of fantastic fictions associated with old women, these "fairy tale fantasies can be expressed only because they are pronounced through the mouths of old women."[13]

Yet to speak of the fairy tale as a feminized genre is not to say that men did not tell or write fairy tales; they most surely did. And the mere fact that men enjoyed greater access to education than women, and thus were literate in greater numbers, and that professional itinerant storytellers found in Italian squares tended to be male,[14] necessarily meant that men produced the majority of all sorts of written tales as well as many of the oral tales performed publicly in this period, as they had been in the past.[15] And when the genre begins to appear in the vernacular and in print in early modern Italy, it does so almost exclusively in the hands of male authors. In fact, despite the fairy tale's close association with women, the first three collections of early modern fairy tales published in Italy (and indeed in Europe) were authored by men: Straparola's *The Pleasant Nights*, Selva's *The Metamorphosis* (1582), and Giambattista Basile's *The Tale of Tales* (1634–1636), which, due to its structural resemblance to the *Decameron*, acquired the title *The Pentamerone*.[16] Certainly, other Italian men had written marvelous tales before or at the same times these works were published. For example, Giovanni Sercambi

12. Jan Ziolkowski, "Old Wives' Tales: Classicism and Anti-Classicism from Apuleius to Chaucer," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 12 (2002): 100.

13. Ziolkowski, "Old Wives' Tales," 113. Ziolkowski also speaks of Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* in these terms.

14. On *cantimbanchi*, or streetsingers, in Italy, see Rosa Salzberg and Massimo Rospocher, "Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication," *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 1 (2012): 9–26.

15. On storytellers and marvelous tales in the ancient world, see Graham Anderson, *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

16. Selva's *Metamorphosis* and Basile's *The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little One* are described in more detail later in this introduction.

(Lucca, 1348–1424) included two tales in his collection of novellas that contain motifs typical to the fairy tale. In Sercambi's novella 15, four men with extraordinary powers befriend a fifth and use their remarkable talents to help him win the hand of the daughter of the king of France. In novella 122, after a young man saves a dragon from a fire, the monster bestows on him the power to understand the language of animals which he uses to cure, and then eventually marry, a princess. A male narrator, simply called "l'autore" (the author), recounts all of Sercambi's tales.[17] A contemporary of Straparola, the Pistoian Giovanni Forteguerri (1508–1582), includes in his collection a tale narrated by a young woman about a man granted three wishes by the god Neptune, which recalls, at least in the fact that a marine creature grants wishes, Straparola's tale of Pietro (3.1).[18] Neither Sercambi's nor Forteguerri's novellas were published until the nineteenth century. Straparola's, Basile's, and Selva's texts distinguish themselves among these other collections of novellas for their intensified focus on the marvelous and the number of fairy tales included. In each of these texts, only young or old women narrate fairy tales, while men either listen silently or tell other sorts of tales. All three were printed during a time when Italian women's writings were being published at unprecedented rates.[19] And yet despite the literary fairy tale's feminized status and the greater opportunity for women to see their work in print, to my knowledge no Italian women published a collection of fairy tales in this period.[20] This fact is even more surprising when we consider that Straparola's *The Pleasant Nights* enjoyed many reprintings during the sixteenth century and his name became synonymous with storytelling in that period.

While Italian women seemed not to find Straparola suitable for imitation, French women writing fairy tales in salons during the 1690s found *The Pleasant Nights* a compelling model. Certainly, today, Charles Perrault, the author of *Tales of Times Passed by Mother Goose* (1697), is the best-known French author from this period; however, women writers such as Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy, Marie-Jeanne Lhéretier, and Henriette-Julie de Murat produced two-thirds of the fairy

17. For Sercambi's tales I am using the numeration of the following modern edition: Giovanni Sercambi, *Novelle*, ed. Giovanni Sinicropi (Bari: Laterza, 1973).

18. This is novella 2 in Giovanni Forteguerri, *Novelle edite ed inedite*, ed. Vittorio Lami (Bologna: Romagnoli, 1882). On the use of fairy tale motifs in Italian tales written before 1400, see Nancy Canepa's essay "Italy," in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales,* ed. Jack Zipes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 252–55.

19. The list of women-authored texts in The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe series testifies to the increase of number of women publishing. This phenomenon is discussed in detail in the final section of this introduction.

20. Giulia Bigolina is the woman who came closest to experimenting with this new genre. Her work is discussed at the end of this introduction, as is Moderata Fonte's mythological tale that contains fairy tale motifs.

tales created in this era.[21] Indeed, Madame de Murat would admit openly in her preface to *Sublime and Allegorical Tales* (1699) that she and other French female authors freely adopted and adapted the plots of Straparola's fairy tales. She confesses to her readers:

> I am pleased to indicate two things to the Reader. The first is that I took the ideas for some of these Tales from an earlier Author entitled *Les facecieuses nuits du Seigneur Straparole*, printed for the sixteenth time in 1615. These tales were apparently very fashionable during the last century, as there has been so much discussed about this book. The Ladies who have written up until now in this genre have drawn from the same source, at least for the most part. The second thing I have to say is that my Tales were written since last April, and that if there are similarities with one of these Ladies in discussing some of my Subjects, I did not use any model other than the original, which will be easy to prove by the different paths we have taken.[22]

Why did Italian women eschew the genre while French women found Straparola such a compelling model? And why, despite the best seller status of *The Pleasant Nights*, did so few Italian authors, male or female, write literary fairy tales?

In this introduction, I examine the ways in which *The Pleasant Nights* simultaneously replicates what were the existent iconographies of the fairy tale and resists them by painting a new portrait of the fairy tale narrator. I show that in the frame tale in *The Pleasant Nights*, in which a group of ladies and gentlemen gather together in Venice during Carnival to dance, sing songs, and tell tales, Straparola depicts his fairy tale narrators as talented, culturally sophisticated young women, an image that challenged entrenched assumptions about the genre being the domain of old crones spinning tales around the hearth and more closely mirrored the sophisticated French women who would write fairy tales in Parisian salons. Straparola's fairy tales defied categorization in existing canonical literary categories and exerted both attractive and repulsive forces on his readers and would-be imitators. Inasmuch as this feminized genre remained outside of the literary canon, despite Straparola's efforts, and thus was often ignored or dismissed, for both male and female authors the fairy tale would become a safe textual space in which to stage cultural critiques. Reading his collection of tales allows us to better understand the way in which male and female voices were braided together to

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21. Lewis C. Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France, 1690–1715* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

22. Madame Henriette-Julie de Murat, "Perrault's Preface to *Griselda* and Murat's 'To Modern Fairies,'" ed. and trans. Holly Tucker and Melanie R. Siemens, *Marvels & Tales* 19, no. 1 (2005): 129–30.

create a genre that, despite being viewed primarily as feminized, would crisscross gender boundaries in the centuries that followed.

In the past twenty-five years, Straparola's *The Pleasant Nights* has enjoyed a surge of critical attention outside of Italy, primarily in the fields of fairy tale studies and folklore, as well as a number of new editions and translations. A good number of these studies have focused on issues surrounding the origins and sources of the tales in *The Pleasant Nights*. Ruth Bottigheimer's claim that Straparola invented certain of his fairy tales rather than rely on oral sources has sparked a debate over the origins of the genre.[23] Donald Beecher's recent edition of *The Pleasant Nights*, which is a republication of W. G. Waters's Victorian translation, contains detailed commentaries for each tale, indicating possible sources as well as later versions of the tale by other authors.[24] In this essay, I do not enter into the debate about the possible origins of the fairy tale, nor does this translation include extensive references to possible sources, analogues, or later versions of each tale. Nor do I analyze extensively the rich literary context in which *The Pleasant Nights* was written, as many Italian scholars have done.[25] Instead, as indicated above and as is fitting for a volume in The Other Voice series, this introduction focuses primarily on the way in which *The Pleasant Nights* weaves together male and female voices and how Straparola's particular engagement of issues of gender shapes the tradition of the literary fairy tale inside and outside of Italy.

Straparola's Life and Works

Centuries after the publication of *The Pleasant Nights*, Straparola's identity and biography remain shrouded in mystery; we know very little for certain about Straparola's origins and life experience. Literary historians have compiled the sparsest of biographies of him by gleaning information from his literary texts rather than from archival documents, specifically, the title pages, paratexts, and content of the two literary works he is known to have published.[26] Indeed, the

23. Ruth Bottigheimer first made this claim in *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), and then again in *Fairy Tales: A New History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009). Her thesis has been challenged by folklorists and literary critics. See the issue of *Journal of American Folklore* dedicated to this debate for critiques by Francisco Vaz da Silva, Dan Ben-Amos, and Jan Ziolkowski as well as Bottigheimer's response: vol. 123, no.490 (Fall 2010): 377–497. To my mind, her claim has been productive in that it has pushed scholars on both sides of the issue to reconsider the complex relationship between the oral and written traditions.

24. Donald Beecher, ed., *The Pleasant Nights* by Giovan Francesco Straparola, trans. W. G. Waters, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

25. Two of the first to do so were Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti and Giancarlo Mazzacurati; their research is cited below.

26. The most detailed biography of Straparola can be found in Donato Pirovano's "Nota biografica," in his edition of *Le piacevoli notti* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2000), 1:li–liv. Ruth Bottigheimer imagines

only certainties regarding Straparola's biography are found in his bibliography. In 1508, Giovan Francesco "Streparola"[27] published a *Canzoniere*, a collection of Petrarchan love lyrics in which he declared himself to be "young and unknown" ("giovanil and senza note") in one sonnet, and of "a tender age" ("verde etade") in another.[28] Based on the declaration of his youth in these poems, Straparola's birth has been estimated at around 1480. The title pages for the two editions of his *Canzoniere* and *The Pleasant Nights* indicate that he was a native of the northern Italian city of Caravaggio. Since he published his books and set the frame tale of *The Pleasant Nights* in Venice, and his prose is peppered with words from the Venetian dialect, at some point in his life he most likely left Caravaggio and migrated to Venice. Based on the fact that the 1557 edition of *The Pleasant Nights* was the last edition to be published at the author's request, "ad istanza d'autore," his death date is often estimated to be 1557, or shortly thereafter. As Donato Pirovano points out, however, the 1557 edition is merely a reprint of the 1555 edition, so it is possible that Straparola had passed away years earlier.[29] In any case, no record of Straparola's death has ever been found, and so both the date and place of his death remain uncertain.

His surname Straparola, which means "one who talks too much," provides us with no clue to his identity. Despite the reprinting of Straparola's *Canzoniere* in 1515, a sign perhaps of his modest success as a poet, and the numerous editions of his tales, men like Pietro Aretino, who chronicled the Venetian cultural scene in their letters and mentioned the deeds and fates of some of the historical personages who appear in Straparola's frame tale, make no mention of Straparola himself. Apart from his poetry and prose, the only physical trace of Straparola's existence that has survived him is a book containing his ex libris, which is now held in a library in Bergamo.[30] Whereas we know almost nothing about Straparola's life, we do know a great deal about the editorial, cultural, and aesthetic forces that shaped his heterogeneous collection of tales and rendered mid-sixteenth-century Italy, and more specifically Venice, the logical place for its publication.

For political, economic, and cultural reasons, Venice became an especially hospitable city for producing and consuming all sorts of tales during Straparola's lifetime. Venice was a thriving international port city open both to the East and West, as well as the European center for printing and the book trade. By the mid-sixteenth century, polymaths were able to support themselves by writing and

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a more complete version of Straparola's biography by analyzing his social historical context in "A Possible Biography for Zoan Francesco Straparola da Caravaggio," in *Fairy Godfather*, 45–81.

27. A variant of Straparola.

28. Sonnets 14 and 54 respectively. Quoted in Giuseppe Rua, "Intorno alle *Piacevoli notti* dello Straparola," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 15 (1890): 111–12.

29. Pirovano, "Nota biografica," liv.

30. On this see Pirovano, "Nota biografica," lii.

editing all sorts of texts, including original collections of novellas or translations of tales from eastern traditions, such as the *Panchatantra*, a collection of animal tales in Sanskrit that had been translated into Italian in 1540.[31] Unlike Florence or nearby Ferrara, Venice lacked a single, centralized court to dictate a cultural agenda. Instead, Venetians and foreigners alike hosted multiple salons throughout the city, where they enjoyed music, storytelling, and parlor games, as the characters in Straparola's frame tale do.[32] Outside these salons, in Venice's teeming streets and squares, itinerant storytellers were performing and hawking cheap imprints of *cantari*, or short tales in verse that often recounted the exploits of the knights and ladies of the chivalric tradition,[33] and included those marvels typical of fairy tales, such as seven-league boots and cloaks of darkness.[34]

The Pleasant Nights

Straparola's *The Pleasant Nights* is a collection of seventy-three novellas circumscribed by a narrative frame tale; it was first published in two volumes in Venice in 1550 and 1553.[35] In *The Pleasant Nights*, Straparola creates a muted copy of the frame tale in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and in doing so he firmly yokes his text to the dominant model for sixteenth-century male authors who chose to write in prose. Like Boccaccio's frame tale, which begins with the a description of the devastating Black Plague, Straparola's *The Pleasant Nights* opens with localized political unrest that drives Straparola's protagonists, Ottaviano Maria Sforza and his daughter Lucrezia Gonzaga, from their home in Lodi. While Boccaccio's ten narrators seek refuge in an idyllic villa in the Tuscan countryside, Straparola's two protagonists

31. Translating from a Spanish edition, Agnolo Firenzuola published the *Panchatantra* in 1540. See Marziano Guglielminetti, *La cornice e il furto: Studi sulla novella del '500* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1984), 10. The polymath Anton Francesco Doni translated both books of the *Panchatantra* and published them in Venice under the title *Moral filosofia* in 1552. Marga Cottino-Jones, "Princesses, Kings, and the Fantastic: A Re-Vision of the Language of Representation in the Renaissance," *Italian Quarterly* 37, nos. 143–146 (2000), 174.

32. Martha Feldman, *City Culture and the Madrigal in Venice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3–4.

33. On these street singers and their wares, see Rosa Salzberg's "'Selling Stories and Many Other Things in and through the City': Peddling Print in Renaissance Florence and Venice," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 42, no. 3 (2011), 737–59.

34. See for example the anonymous *Historia di Lionbruno*, which was printed in Venice in 1476: Beatrice Corrigan, ed. and trans., *The Story of Lionbruno: Historia di Lionbruno* (Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1976).

35. The earliest editions contained seventy-three tales. Beginning with the 1555 edition, as I explain below, tale 8.3 was replaced by two shorter tales bringing the total number of tales to seventy-four. These two tales can be found in the appendix to this volume. For the publication history of *The Pleasant Nights*, see the final section of this essay.

find safe haven in a rented villa on the Venetian island of Murano. Boccaccio's ten young Florentines, three men and seven women, recount one tale each per day, over the course of ten days; Straparola's Lucrezia oversees the evening entertainment created by and for her invited guests, which includes singing, dancing, storytelling, and the solving of riddles for thirteen nights during Carnival. Whereas we learn only the first names of Boccaccio's narrators, the merry band over which Lucrezia presides includes both recognized historical figures—noblewomen, merchants, prelates, and poets—and ten *damigelle* or young women, who are known only by their first names (with one exception).[36] In Boccaccio's *Decameron*, everyone participates in the storytelling and takes a turn presiding over a day's proceedings as king or queen. In *The Pleasant Nights*—despite the presence of Pietro Bembo, the plurilingual playwright Antonio Molino, and other poets—Lucrezia initially assigns the task of storytelling to the ten *damigelle*, five of whom are chosen each night by lot to narrate a tale, with men only occasionally entering the narrative circle as storytellers. But the derivative nature of Straparola's frame tale belies the true innovation of *The Pleasant Nights*, for some sixteen of the seventy-three *favole*, as the narrators call their tales, figure among the first literary fairy tales to be published in western Europe. Considered a founding father of the European fairy tale tradition, Straparola is, in fact, the author of Puss-in-Boots (11.1), as well as a dragon slayer tale (10.3) and an early version of Beauty and the Beast (2.1).[37]

The seventy-three stories recounted by Straparola's narrators form a heterogeneous anthology of the many different types of tales that were circulating in Italy at mid-century. Undoubtedly, this eclecticism contributed to the editorial success of *The Pleasant Nights*.[38] Many of these are realistic novellas in the Boccaccian tradition: tragic and comic love stories, adventures that illustrate the vagaries of Fortune, tales of the sexual escapades of unfaithful spouses and bawdy clergymen, or accounts of *beffe* or elaborate practical jokes played upon unsuspecting dupes. But there are also numerous tales that in regard to language or content draw upon

36. The exception is Cateruzza Brunetta, but scholars have not yet uncovered any biographical information on her.

37. Straparola has been assigned this role both in anthologies and in critical studies. Ruth Bottigheimer argues in *Fairy Godfather*, 5, that Straparola—rather than writing down an oral tradition—invented the "rise" fairy tale, in which a poor protagonist marries and acquires wealth thanks to magic. Jack Zipes's anthology features Straparola as the first European author to write a significant number of tales: *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). As Zipes states elsewhere, "Straparola was not an original writer, but he was the first to make a substantial contribution to the shaping of the literary fairy tale and to give it a prominent place in his tale collection": Jack Zipes, "Of Cats and Men: Framing the Civilizing Discourse of the Fairy Tale," in *Out of the Woods: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France*, ed. Nancy L. Canepa, intro. Nancy L. Canepa and Antonella Ansani (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press1997), 178.

38. On this point see Pirovano's "Introduzione," *Le piacevoli notti*, 1:xv.

tale traditions that differ from that of the realistic novella. There is one animal tale that tells of a donkey outwitting a lion and recalls both the well-known tales of Aesop and the *Panchatantra*. There are tales that are far more scatological and openly crude than anything found in the *Decameron*. On the fifth night, Antonio Molino and Benedetto Trivigiano each tell a tale in dialect. The former narrates in Bergamasque, the latter in Pavano dialect. And, of course, there are the fairy tales.

The second volume differs from the first in that it contains fewer fairy tales as well as a number of stories that have been taken from other collections of tales. Three of the tales in volume 2 of *The Pleasant Nights* are based on tales from the *Decameron*, while another twenty-three are unacknowledged translations from the Latin tales in the *Novellae* (1520) of the Neapolitan humanist Girolamo Morlini.[39] The dedicatory letters to both volumes serve to deflect charges of plagiarism by depicting Straparola as a scribe who faithfully transcribed the tales as they were told, rather than as the author of the tales. This common fiction of presenting the author of novellas as a scribe began with Boccaccio's *Decameron*. It served to protect authors from criticism and censure regarding the style or content of their tales.[40] In the dedicatory letter in volume 1, Straparola's editor Orfeo dalla carta (Orpheus of the paper) urges readers, "Disregard the author's humble and lowly style, since he did not write them as he wished to, but as he heard them from those women who recounted them, neither adding nor subtracting a thing."[41] Straparola defends himself against charges of plagiarism in his dedicatory letter to volume 2: "To tell the truth, I confess that they are not mine, and if I were to say otherwise, I would be lying; I have written them down quite faithfully according to the way they were recounted by the ten young maidens at that gathering." Rather than denounce Straparola as a plagiarist or thief, it is perhaps more accurate to consider

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39. Tales 7.1, 9.2, and 12.5 in *The Pleasant Nights* are reworkings of tales 3.9, 4.8, and 10.1 in the *Decameron*. I have indicated in the notes to the translation when and which tales Straparola has "borrowed" and translated from Morlini. Straparola was not a faithful translator and often changed the settings for tales from Morlini's Naples to northern Italian cities, and sometimes added to, or removed portions from, Morlini's tales. On Straparola's use of Morlini, see Marziano Guglielminetti, "Dalle 'Novellae' del Morlini alle 'Favole' dello Straparola," in *Medievo e Rinascimimento veneto: Con altri studi in onore di Lino Lazzarini*, vol. 2: *Dal Cinquecento al Novecento* (Padua: Antenore, 1979), 69–81; and Giovanni Villani, "Da Morlini a Straparola: Problemi di traduzione e problemi del testo," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 159 (1962): 67–73.

40. For use of this fiction as a sort of "'protective screen' to justify the inclusion of licentious or anticlerical stories," see Robert J. Clements and Joseph Gibaldi, *Anatomy of the Novella* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 18.

41. In the dedicatory letter of the first edition "dalla carta" is not capitalized and so has been understood to be an attribute or characteristic of Orfeo (Orpheus) rather than his surname. See Donatao Pirovano, "Una storia editoriale cinquecentesca: *Le piacevoli notti* di Giovan Francesco Straparola," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 177 (2000): 545. For more on Orfeo dalla carta, see volume 1, note 1.

him within the context of mid-sixteenth-century Venetian editorial culture, in which such acts of authorial borrowing were common. Mario Petrini describes Straparola as a polymath of the novella ("poligrafo della novella") comparable to the polymaths working in Venice at that time, who produced eclectic texts that mixed registers and genres and were composed through the process of *riscrittura*, or rewriting unacknowledged borrowings from other texts.[42] In a similar way, Straparola assumed a multifaceted role as writer-compiler-translator weaving together realistic novellas, humanist anecdotes, animal stories, and fairy tales.[43]

Like Boccaccio before him, Straparola does not explicitly label the different sorts of tales in his collection and the vast majority of his narratives are simply referred to as *favole*.[44] In the sixteenth century, the word *favola* denoted a wide variety of narrative genres in prose and verse including Straparola's fantastic fairy tales, more realistic Boccaccian novellas, Aesop's fables, and stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The word could also mean nonsense or something not true.[45] Perhaps it was the polysemous nature of the word and its capaciousness that appealed to Straparola, for it aptly applies to the variety of tales in his collection. Or perhaps he wished to signal to his readers that he was straying from the Boccaccian novella tradition.[46]

Despite a lack of clear terminology, it is easy to recognize and distinguish the fairy tales in *The Pleasant Nights* from other sorts of stories. Whereas Boccaccio's (and Straparola's own) realistic novellas represent the vast spectrum of social status, from paupers to clergy to merchants to royalty, Straparola's fairy tales focus mainly on those at the extreme ends of the social economic spectrum: the truly

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42. Mario Petrini, *La fiaba di magia nella letteratura italiana* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1983), 153.

43. Donald Beecher calls Straparola "the founder of literary ethnography": Beecher, *The Pleasant Nights*, 1:7.

44. The few exceptions, all occurring in the second volume of *The Pleasant Nights*, are as follows: 6.2 is referred to as a "facezia" ("witty anecdote"); both tales 6.3 and 13. 9 are called a "caso" ("case"); tale 9.3 is described as "ritiene piú tosto della istoria che della favola" ("considered to be more history than tale"); tale 10.3 is called a "novelluzza" ("a little novella"); tale 12.4 is called a "breve novella" ("brief novella"); and tale 12.5 is called a "novella"; in tale 12.2 the preceding tale (12.1) is referred to as a "novella."

45. Stefano Calabrese demonstrates the imprecision of the terminology in this period in part by noting that in Straparola's tale 10.3 the narrator Alteria speaks of consulting ancient and modern "istorie," refers to the tale that preceded hers as a "favola" (it is the story of the lion and the ass), and then proceeds to recount a dragon slayer tale that she calls a "novelluzza." Stefano Calabrese, "L'enigma del racconto: Dallo Straparola al Basile," *Lingua e stile* 18, no. 2 (1983): 178.

46. Marga Cottino-Jones suggests that "the use of the term *favola* instead of the most often used *novella* seems therefore willfully imposed [on] the majority of the *Piacevoli notti* tales as a signature to indicate a narrative form more interested in representing a low-class popular world inspired by the emotional and the *fantastic*, rather than by the rational and the logic[al], rather than in constructing a historical reality organized in a coherent and rational way by an elitist, usually aristocratic or high middle-class point of view": "Princesses, Kings, and the Fantastic," 176.

impoverished and royalty. Straparola's fairy tales are stories about young people making their way in the world after leaving their homes and families by establishing themselves in adult society through marriage and the acquisition of wealth. Unlike the protagonists of Boccaccio's novellas and Straparola's own realistic tales, who often achieve similar goals by dint of their own wit or the turn of Fortune's wheel, the protagonists of Straparola's fairy tales arrive at their happy endings by magical means, most often through the use of a magic object or the favor of an enchanted being, be it a fairy, a magic doll, or a talking animal. Metamorphosis is a hallmark of the fairy tale and Straparola's protagonists experience changes in their physical being as well as their socioeconomic status. By way of enchantments, the protagonists shift shape to become animals or objects or they regrow severed limbs. These same enchantments help the protagonists to either rise up from their impoverished origins or to regain their noble rank, to marry, and to live happily ever after.

Historical Context:
 Imitation and Innovation in Straparola's The Pleasant Nights

As Straparola penned his tales in mid-sixteenth-century Venice, the Boccaccian tradition was waning and authors were experimenting with more radical departures from their model; Venice's many well-established printing houses were looking for innovative texts to sell in an expanding marketplace; and various aesthetic, literary, and historical developments brought discussions on marvels and the marvelous to the forefront of cultural debates.

The seemingly paradoxical demands for imitation and innovation shaped the content and language of *The Pleasant Nights*. Straparola wrote at a moment in which Boccaccio's *Decameron* was held up as both a linguistic and literary model for those wishing to write tales in the vernacular. Decades earlier, Pietro Bembo had declared in his influential treatise *Writings on the Vernacular* (1525) that authors wishing to write Italian prose should imitate the language of Boccaccio and those wishing to write verse should imitate Petrarch. To some extent, Straparola dutifully followed these literary prescriptions, for a multitude of intertextualities bind *The Pleasant Nights* to these two literary models. Straparola inserts phrases, sentences, and entire tales from the *Decameron* into his own text.[47] The songs sung at the beginning of each night of storytelling echo the tropes and themes of Petrarch's verse. As if to recognize these prevailing literary norms, Straparola includes Pietro Bembo as one of the narrators in the frame tale. Although

47. On Straparola's rewriting Boccaccio's tale 3.9 in his own tale 7.1, see Giuseppe Bonomo, "Motivi stregonici in una novella dello Straparola," *Rassegna della letterature italiana* 62 (1958): 365–69. Donato Pirovano documents these and many other intertextualities in his edition of *Le piacevoli notti* and illustrates how Straparola reutilized passages from Boccaccio's novellas in his own tales. For a discussion of Straparola's borrowings from the *Decameron* see Pirovano's "Introduzione" to *Le piacevoli notti*, 1:xxxvi–xliv.

Straparola's character Bembo does not mention his linguistic and literary theories during these carnival gatherings and contributes only one tale over the course of the thirteen nights, his presence signals an attempt to gain critical legitimacy for the text. Perhaps, as some critics have suggested, Straparola's inclusion of Bembo and his imitation of the structure of the *Decameron* were attempts to compensate for the ways in which his text deviated from linguistic norms: he writes a few tales and riddles in different dialects and includes a good many Venetian words in his Italian tales; more radically, he places fairy tales alongside his realistic novellas.[48]

While literary conventions encouraged Straparola to imitate the great masterpieces of the fourteenth century, the burgeoning print trade encouraged and rewarded experimentation. As literacy rates increased during the sixteenth century and technological advances in printing served to make books more affordable, editors and printers sought new sorts of books that would attract readers in a marketplace crowded with original works, canonical Italian as well as ancient texts, and translations from other national literatures. This same demand for novelty that has been credited with bringing women into print beginning in 1538 with the publication of Vittoria Colonna's poems,[49] most likely also inspired Straparola to write and publish his fairy tales. The early print history of *The Pleasant Nights* seems to indicate that Straparola's editor, Orfeo dalla carta, and his printer, Comin da Trino, sought to test the editorial waters to see if the public would embrace his tales by initially publishing only the first volume. This first volume closes in a such a way as to suggest that another will be forthcoming, for it ends after the fifth night of storytelling with a promise that the festivities will continue the following night.[50] When the first volume sold well, it was reprinted, and the second volume was then published for the first time two years later in 1553. Perhaps, as Giancarlo Mazzacurati suggests, Straparola's text, with its somewhat outdated, canonical frame tale circumscribing folkloric tales as well as realistic novellas, also succeeded in satisfying the taste of a new reading public, one that was neither bourgeois nor courtly and dwelled on the geographic and intellectual margins of Italian high culture.[51]

48. Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, "Problemi di tecnica narrativa cinquecentesca: Lo Straparola," *Sigma* 5 (1965): 84.

49. See Diana Robin's *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) on how presses encouraged women's appearance in print. For an extensive bibliography of women-authored texts published in this period, see Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 235–45.

50. Donato Pirovano, "The Literary Fairy Tale of Giovan Francesco Straparola," *Romanic Review* 99, nos. 3–4 (2008): 283–84. For more details on the publication of *The Pleasant Nights*, see also Pirovano, "Una storia editoriale cinquecentesca: *Le piacevoli notti di* Giovan Francesco Straparola," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 177 (2000): 540–69.

51. Giancarlo Mazzacurati, "La narrativa di G. F. Straparola e l'ideologia del fiabesco," in *Forma e ideologia* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1974), 76.

Of course, Straparola certainly was not the only author of tales to experiment with the novella genre. The mid-sixteenth century witnessed the creation of numerous variations on the Boccaccian model.[52] Straparola, however, wisely negotiated the seemingly contradictory demands for imitation and innovation by employing a structurally traditional frame tale clearly modeled on the *Decameron* to circumscribe the fantastic fairy tales that capitalized on a renewed taste for the marvelous that would grow over the course of the century.

In Straparola's fairy tales, women give birth to pigs and snakes, young men slay dragons and monsters, wild men and satyrs inhabit the woods, and talking animals grant the wishes of hapless young men. For Straparola's first readers, marvels such as these were not exclusively the stuff of fairy tales; cases of women giving birth to animals, dragons threatening hunters, and wild men captured by travelers were discussed in the courts, academies, churches, and public squares of Europe.[53] The years 1500 to 1700 have been called the Age of the Marvelous,[54] for in these centuries New World explorers brought strange animals, plants, and objects to the Old World, where their descriptions and images reached a curious public on the pages of printed books. New scientific technologies such as the telescope and microscope would bring "new" celestial bodies and life forms into view. The decades following the publication of *The Pleasant Nights* also witnessed the Catholic Church's renewed efforts to eradicate witchcraft and superstitions, which were perceived to produce diabolical marvels through spells and incantations, while also authenticating those wonders considered to be true miracles and denouncing those deemed to be fakes.[55] Recent scholarship has demonstrated that this proliferation of marvels brought about a clearer articulation of scientific,

52. For example, in *I diporti* (1551), Girolamo Parabosco expanded the role of the narrative frame tale beyond that of simply introducing or providing commentary on the novellas. Parabosco's narrators recount seventeen tales, but they also debate questions of love, and read and critique poetry in discussions so protracted and complex that at times *I Diporti* seems to more closely resemble a literary dialogue than a collection of tales. In his collection of novellas published in 1554, Matteo Bandello abandoned the frame tale altogether and opted instead to frame each tale with an epistle addressed to a specific recipient. Perhaps wishing to avoid the charges of immorality and lasciviousness leveled at Boccaccio's tales of amorous adventures, Sebastiano Erizzo experimented with a new kind of story in his *Le sei giornate* of 1567, which he claimed were not novellas but moralized events intended to provide instruction for the reader on different virtues.

53. On these points, see Magnanini, *Fairy-Tale Science*, 19–48.

54. I take the phrase "Age of the Marvelous" from Joy Kenseth's catalogue *The Age of the Marvelous* (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum Dartmouth, 1991).

55. The historians John Tedeschi and William Monter have documented the increase in the Roman Inquisition's prosecution of witchcraft in their article "Towards a Statistical Profile of Italian Inquisitions, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe: Studies on Sources and Methods*, ed. Gustav Henningsen and John Tedeschi with Charles Amiel (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 130–57.

philosophical, and aesthetic theories of wonder and the marvelous.[56] So while wonder tales had existed since antiquity, in the sixteenth century wonder and the objects that provoked it, including literary texts, were particularly sought out and prized.[57]

In Italian academies, universities, and courts, debates on the proper use of the literary marvelous increased markedly in the wake of the rediscovery and translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*.[58] While the important role of the marvelous in literary and more broadly intellectual endeavors was acknowledged in classical texts available at the beginning of the sixteenth century,[59] the *Poetics* positioned the marvelous at the center of literary debates with its call for both mimesis or imitation as a governing principle of artistic creation and for the presence of the marvelous in poetry. According to Aristotle, tragedies and epic poems should include marvels aimed at delighting the audience. Debates erupted across the Italian peninsula over which marvels should appear in epic poetry and how they should be employed, as theorists and writers examined poems such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Ludovico Ariosto's *The Frenzy of Orlando* (1532), and Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that in this same period Straparola chose to write literary fairy tales, a genre often distinguished

56. The past twenty years have witnessed the publication of numerous works on this subject. See, for example, Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Mary B. Campbell, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

57. Marga Cottino-Jones suggests that Angolo Firenzuola's translation of Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* and the second book of the *Panchatantra* (*Prima veste dei Discorsi degli Animali,* 1541), as well as Anton Francesco Doni's translation of both books of the *Panchatantra* (*La moral filosofia*), are indicative of this new interest in the *fantastic*, or wonder: Cottino-Jones, "Princesses, Kings, and the Fantastic," 174 .

58. Baxter Hathaway, *Marvels and Commonplaces: Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), 9. Bernard Weinberg calls this rediscovery the "signal event" in Renaissance literary criticism: Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 1:349.

59. In *Natural History*, Pliny purported that works of art could be considered wonders, particularly when the mimetic skill of the painter deceived the viewer into mistaking art for nature. See Kenseth, "The Age of the Marvelous," 28; James V. Mirollo, "The Aesthetics of the Marvelous," in Kenseth, *The Age of the Marvelous*, 68. In the *Metaphysics* (1.2.9), Aristotle asserts: "It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about greater matters too, for example about the changes of the moon and the sun, about the stars and about the origins of the universe." Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Hugh Tredennick, vols. 17–18 of *Aristotle in Twenty-three Volumes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 17:13.

from other forms of prose fiction by the presence of marvels, and called by some critics "wonder tales."[60] Ironically, the very wonders that likely made Straparola's text so popular—fairies, necromancers, magic—were the types of marvels that the Catholic Church would begin to suppress in earnest in the 1580s, as a part of the Counter-Reformation efforts to eliminate superstitions and witchcraft.

Finally, in addition, Straparola's fairy tales also engaged issues of class and social and economic mobility that were especially pertinent to Venetian society. Venetian law prohibited marriage across its three classes—nobles, citizens, and the people—although such marriages did take place on rare occasions. At the same time, dowry inflation made it difficult for even wealthy families to marry off all their daughters and sons, and this further tightened the marriage market and encouraged forced monachization, or forcing young women to take religious vows and enter convents as nuns.[61] Straparola's fairy tales in which poor boys and girls scaled the socioeconomic ladder thanks to magic and interclass marriage resulted in personal happiness as well as political stability and peace, provided fictional solutions for Venice's collective marital problems.[62] For example, in Straparola's Puss-in-Boots tale (11.1), Costantino Fortunato, the youngest of three impoverished brothers, inherits only a cat when his mother dies. The cat, however, turns out to be a fairy who manages to cure Costantino's mange, find him favor with the king, arrange his marriage with the princess, and obtain a castle and land where Costantino and his bride can live happily. Fairy tales such as these could provide a fantasy of upward mobility to the lower classes while assuaging the anxieties of the nobles regarding the perils of interclass marriage.[63]

Straparola's Damigelle *and Their Fairy Tales*

In the dedicatory letters to each volume of *The Pleasant Nights*, Straparola appears as a scribe who dutifully copied down the tales as the female narrators recounted them. In doing so, both Straparola and his editor Orfeo dalla carta posit female voices as the source for all of the tales while ignoring the male narrators who also

60. See, for example, Marina Warner, ed., *Wonder Tales* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 4. Michele Rak makes a similar observation in "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), 14.

61. On the pressures of the Venetian market and forced monachization see Jutta Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

62. In *Fairy Godfather,* Ruth Bottigheimer calls these sorts of fairy tales "rise tales" and argues, persuasively I think, that they offered to the lower classes a fantasy of social and economic mobility that would have been impossible in sixteenth-century Venice.

63. For a more detailed reading of how Straparola's tale of the Pig King (2.1) functioned to address the concerns surrounding interclass marriage, see the chapter "Bestiality and Interclass Marriage in Straparola's 'Il re porco,'" in Magnanini, *Fairy-Tale Science*, 93–116.

contribute to the storytelling. While initially the task of storytelling is assigned to the young maidens, men will narrate tales on the second, fifth, sixth, ninth, and thirteenth nights. On that final night of storytelling, the men and the older women present, Lucrezia, Chiara, and Veronica, are invited to join the narrative circle as storytellers and replace some of the young female narrators.[64] Lucrezia also narrates the final tale of the fifth night, which closes the first volume of *The Pleasant Nights*. Although male and female narrators are present for each night during Carnival, only the *damigelle*, or young women, will tell fairy tales, whereas their male companions opt for verisimilar novellas. Furthermore, in those moments in which men are called upon to tell tales, they often define tale telling as women's work or distinguish their own stories from the women's fairy tales by insisting upon their veracity.[65] Thus, while in actuality both men and women tell tales in *The Pleasant Nights*, telling tales is defined as women's work and the fairy tale becomes the exclusive narrative domain of women, in particular of Straparola's *damigelle*.

Initially, then, it might appear as though Straparola simply replicates entrenched assumptions regarding the fairy tale as women's work. Straparola's *damigelle*, however, resemble neither Apuleius's old woman comforting Charite with the tale of Cupid and Psyche, nor Boccaccio's crazy old women entertaining young women, old folks, and children. Apart from their sex, they are not "classic" storytellers. Instead, Straparola creates a group portrait of these young women in which, although it is difficult to distinguish among the individual figures, one perceives a new image of the fairy tale narrator.

They inhabit a space that, although domestic (it is Lucrezia's home), more closely resembles a salon than a spinning room or hearth, due to both the presence of learned and politically important men and the emphasis on cultural production, rather than domestic labor. Their participation in the Carnival festivities reveals that they possess the sort of education shared by sixteenth-century court ladies, courtesans, and *virtuose*, female poets and musicians who were called upon to entertain Venice's upper classes. They are well spoken and well read. Many of the tales

64. Antonio Molino and Benedetto Trivigiano each tell a tale on the second and fifth nights. Antonio Bembo recounts a tale on the sixth night, while Ferier Beltramo tells one on the ninth night. On the thirteenth and final night of storytelling, Lucrezia commands all the men and women to participate by telling a tale and Pietro Bembo, Giambattista Casali, Bernardo Cappello, Ferier Beltramo, Antonio Molino, and Benedetto Trivigiano each narrate a tale.

65. For example, on the thirteenth night (first tale), Ambassador Casali states: "Heavy is the burden that the Signora has given me to tell tales, for it is a woman's duty rather than a man's; but since this is her wish and that of this honorable and worthy company, I will force myself, if not wholly, at least in some small part, to satisfy your desire." On the same night, Antonio Molino introduces his tale (13.9) about a hermaphrodite by stating: "My gracious ladies, great and innumerable are the secrets of Nature; nor is there a man who can imagine them all. For this reason, I thought to tell you of a case which is not a tale, but occurred a short time ago in the city of Salerno."

they tell and the songs they sing betray knowledge of the two dominant literary models of their age, Boccaccio and Petrarch, while other tales and riddles indicate a basic knowledge of Latin. They are accomplished dancers and singers who accompany themselves on violas and other string instruments.[66] In sum, Straparola's fairy tale narrators are educated, quick-witted women who associate with a cultural elite in a domestic setting: they are *salonnières* rather than spinners. For these reasons, they recall the *virtuose* of Straparola's day, such as the poet Gaspara Stampa. And like Stampa, whom scholars once believed was a courtesan despite a lack of conclusive evidence, they seem to move between respectability and infamy.[67] The portrait is ambiguous and it is difficult to know just what sort of women we are viewing. Perhaps such ambiguity is to be expected in a society in which women were told to be chaste, silent, and obedient and in which raising one's voice, to sing or to tell a tale, necessarily meant putting one's virtue in question, even as women entered the public sphere through print in ever growing numbers.

Certainly, all the *damigelle* are beautiful, but their beauty is described in terms of Petrarchan stereotypes that make it difficult to distinguish among them.[68] Although the surname of one of the young women (Cateruzza Brunetta) is known, the *damigelle* have not been identified as historical figures. While other female characters in the frame tale (the signoras Lucrezia, Chiara, Veronica) are defined in great part through their relations to men (they are daughters, widows, or wives), the *damigelle* are untethered women, free of kinship ties that would provide them with a positive identity, but thus also free of the expectation that they will preserve the honor of their male relatives by comporting themselves according to societal norms. Understandably, then, readers have arrived at very different conclusions regarding the identity of these women. For Marga Cottino-Jones, they are "constructed as socially and intellectually inferior to the historical characters,"[69] while for Karl-Heinrich Barsch they are social peers of Lucrezia, noblewomen, but noblewomen who were "hired female entertainers."[70] Donald Beecher, instead, suggests

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66. On these musical performances see Cathy Elias, "Musical Performance in Sixteenth-Century Italian Literature: Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*," *Early Music* 17, no. 2 (1989): 161–73. In this article, Elias identifies the music for a number of these songs: "Giovanni Nasco's music for *Ardo tremendo e ne l'ardor* (night 7) appears in a 1562 print of Giolamo Scotto; Vincenzo Ruffo's *Questa fera gentile, dove soglio trovar sovente unita* (night 8) is found in a 1556 reprint of Antonio Gardano; and *Se'l tempo invola* (night 12), also set by Nasco, in a 1561 print of Scotto. As would be expected, these works take the form of madrigals; no other settings of the text are known. Although the first edition of *Le piacevoli notti* predates the earliest known prints of these pieces, this does not preclude the possibility that Straparola knew the music when writing his book" (166).

67. Fiora A. Bassanese, *Gaspara Stampa* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 4.

68. Pirovano, "Introduzione," 1:xvii.

69. Cottino-Jones, "Princesses, Kings, and the Fantastic," 175.

70. Karl-Heinrich Barsch, "The 'Eternal-Womanly' in Novella Narration: Female Roles in the Frames of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Straparola's *Piacevoli notti*, the Queen of Navarre's *Heptameron*, and