

Between Straparola and Basile: three fairy tales from Lorenzo Selva's *Della metamorfosi* (1582).

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Between Straparola and Basile: Three Fairy Tales from Lorenzo Selva's *Della metamorfosi* (1582)

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Abstract

Translated here for the first time, these three fairy tales from the friar Lorenzo Selva's prose romance *Della metamorfosi* (*The Metamorphosis*) deepen our understanding of the early development of the Italian tale tradition in the years between the publication of Straparola's (1550 and 1553) and Basile's tales (1634–1636). Unlike Straparola and Basile, Selva presents his tales as religious allegories. The magic and marvels that are typical of the fairy tale form part of his discussion of Church doctrine regarding both miraculous and demonic transformations. In this way, Selva's literary fairy tales participate in a growing debate on magic and witchcraft.

SUZANNE MAGNANINI

Between Straparola and Basile

Three Fairy Tales from Lorenzo Selva's *Della metamorfosi* (1582)

Translator's Introduction

Writing under the pseudonym Lorenzo Selva, the Franciscan friar Evangelista Marcellino included three fairy tales among the thirteen novellas woven into his prose romance *Della metamorfosi ovvero trasformazione di un virtuoso* (1582; *The Metamorphosis or Transformation of a Virtuous Man*).¹ Despite the fact that the twentieth-century scholar of the novella Letterio di Francia called one of Selva's tales a *fiaba*, or fairy tale (Di Francia, 2: 124–25), and other literary critics before and after him have noted the fantastic or fairy-tale qualities of some of his tales, *The Metamorphosis* has not been routinely included in recent discussions of the history of the literary fairy tale.² However, Selva's text has received modest attention from literary scholars. *The Metamorphosis* is often cited either as part of the tendency to write moralizing novellas in the wake of the Council of Trent (Bonora 333; Riccò) or as an early example of the prose romances that would be so popular during the seventeenth century (Albertazzi "Due romanzi morali" and *Romanzieri e romanzi*; Flamini 428; Poceffi 215). Translated here for the first time, these three tales deepen our understanding of the development of the Italian literary fairy-tale tradition in the years between the publication of the two best-known early modern collections of tales: Giovan Francesco Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti* (*The Pleasant Nights*) Venice, 2 vols., 1551 and 1553) and Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (*The Tale of Tales*) Naples, 5 vols., 1634–1636).

In regard to structure and content, *The Metamorphosis* differs significantly from *The Pleasant Nights* and *The Tale of Tales*. For example, Selva does not employ a Boccaccian frame tale in which a number of narrators gather together to tell

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