



HAL
open science

A translation of Apuleius' Metamorphosis and the debate about fiction in the 16th century: the Asino d'oro by Agnolo Firenzuola (1550)

Françoise Lavocat

► To cite this version:

Françoise Lavocat. A translation of Apuleius' Metamorphosis and the debate about fiction in the 16th century: the Asino d'oro by Agnolo Firenzuola (1550). Carole Boidin; Florence Bistagne. The Alterlife of Apuleius, University of London press, pp.125-134, 2021, 978-1-905670-88-8. hal-03947950

HAL Id: hal-03947950

<https://hal.science/hal-03947950v1>

Submitted on 19 Jan 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Françoise Lavocat, « A translation of Apuleius' *Metamorphosis* and the debate about fiction in the 16th century : the *Asino d'oro* by Agnolo Firenzuola (1550) », *The Alterlife of Apuleius*, Edited by F. Bistagne, C. Boidin, and R. Mouren, University of London Press, 2021, p. 125-134

An exploration of my long-standing interest in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* begins with an investigation into the history of interpretation, as related to a changing consciousness of fictionality. This evolving historical consciousness is far from linear (moving from simple unawareness to awareness), but instead uneven, complicated by disconcerting regressions (or what seem to be relapses, based on a teleological view of intellectual history).¹ Sixteenth century translations of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are an excellent case study in a puzzling phenomenon: a shift from literary and allegorical meaning to factual and referential interpretation, along with the rise of demonological knowledge. I, as well as other scholars,² have noticed an impoverishment of allegorical interpretations of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* since Beroaldo's translation. This de-allegorization can be linked to a new historical and factual reading, according to which Apuleius' Lucius is an actual magician; this reading is based on the belief that real metamorphosis is possible, perhaps due in part to the influence of Jean Bodin. In any case, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Apuleius' tale is broadly considered to be merely autobiographical – as is the case for Jean de Montlyard (his translation of Apuleius' text was published in 1612).

More broadly, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the use of the first person is hardly compatible with fiction. Indeed, the number of first-person narratives begins to decrease; according to my research, only 7.5% of fictional texts published in

¹ With regard to Apuleius in the sixteenth century, see my articles 'Frontières troublées de la fiction à la fin de la Renaissance: Apulée et le débat sur la métamorphose', *Cahiers du dix-septième: An Interdisciplinary Journal* XIII, 2 (2011) 92–109 <http://se17.bowdoin.edu/2011-volume-xiii-2>, and 'Zirze ist keine Fable: Verworrene Grenzen in der Spätrenaissance', in *Fakt und Fiktion, Text in Kontext*, ed. Ulrike Schneider and Anita Traninger (Stuttgart 2010) 57-70. And, more broadly, about fiction: *Fait et Fiction, pour une frontière* (Paris 2016).

² See, in particular: Olivier Pédéflous, 'La traduction de l'âne d'or par Guillaume Michel (1517): une contribution à la poétique du roman au XVI^e siècle', *RHLF*/3, 107 (2007) 515–535.

France between 1611 and 1623 are first-person narratives, as opposed to 9% between 1585 and 1610 (33 texts for the whole period). Among this small group of first-person narratives, 25% are republications or translations of older fiction: *La Fiammetta* by Boccaccio, *El Lazarillo de Tormes*, *El Buscon* by Mateo Aleman, and the *Metamorphoses* by Apuleius.³ I presume this is due to an increasing difficulty to grasp the status of a fictional, first-person narrator at the time. Indeed, even today, it is sometimes difficult to comprehend and often becomes the source of competing interpretations. Narratologist Käte Hamburger is right to claim that first-person narratives are a particular kind of fiction, based on simulation. It is therefore especially interesting to examine Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in relation to this problem of interpretation inherent to the use of a first-person narrative.

I will focus on a fascinating case of translation-adaptation by Agnolo Firenzuola. *L'asino d'oro* was written in Rome in 1524-1525, completed around 1532, and published for the first time in Venice in 1550. It was republished three times in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and then included in several editions (one or two every century) of Firenzuola's complete works, in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

This text, far from being the most famous Italian translation of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, is seldom cited by current specialists on the topic (such as Julia Haig Gaisser, Olivier Pédéflous, Giuseppina Magnaldi, and Gian Franco Gionotti). Franziska Küenzlen, however, compares translations of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* by Beroaldo, Sieder, Michel, Lopez de Cortegana, and Firenzuola in her doctoral dissertation (released in 2005 in German). Some of my analysis overlaps with hers, but since Küenzlen takes a linguistic angle, I will instead focus on other aspects, in relation to the history of fiction, along with the intellectual shift from fiction to fact mentioned above. Since a main feature of Firenzuola's translation-adaptation is the use of a first-person narrator – referencing not Apuleius, but himself – we must ask ourselves the following question: what kind of interpretation (allegorical? fictional? factual?) triggers the autobiographical appropriation of *L'asino d'oro* by Agnolo Firenzuola?

³ I have developed this inquiry in 'Fictions en prose à la première personne (1585-1623)', *Études de langue et littérature françaises*, Société d'Études de langue et littératures françaises de l'Université de Kyoto, 14 (2014) 69-87.

I) Unproblematic originality

As with all of Firenzuola's works (except a treatise against the introduction of Greek letters into the Latin alphabet),⁴ *L'asino d'oro* was released after the author's death, in 1550 (by Giolito de Ferrari in Venice).⁵ Firenzuola's brother, Gerolamo, along with his friends took charge of preparing this first edition. *L'asino d'oro* was republished by Giunti in Florence in 1553, and again, in an expurgated edition, in 1598 and 1603 (after the censorship of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*). Born in 1498, Firenzuola wrote this translation in his youth, during a stay in Rome as a priest in the court of Pope Clement VII (Giulio de' Medici) between 1523 and 1526. Afterwards, relieved of his monastic vows and seemingly infected by syphilis or malaria, he spent the remainder of his life in Prato, where he created and developed an academic and intellectual circle. He died in 1543 at the age of 50.⁶

The most remarkable feature of his translation of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* is his replacement of Lucius' name and biography by his own. Lorenzo Scala underlines this choice in his dedicatory letter to Lorenzo Pulci (dated 15 May 1549). But he does not in the least emphasize its originality. He argues that *L'asino d'oro* was probably dear to its author, because Firenzuola never revealed anything about his own life except in this translation.⁷

Questa è adunque la presente traduzione d'Apuleio da lui fatta con quei debiti modi, che convengono a simili imprese; cioè, benissimo intesa, e propriamente trasportata co' veri, e puri, e significanti vocabuli nella lingua nostra, con la figure del dire, e in somma con tutto ciò ch'a lui si richiedeva, per acquistare onore, et per sodisfarne altrui. E ben mostrò egli d'averla approvata,

⁴ *Discaccamento delle nuove lettere* (1524). As Riviello has shown, Firenzuola, along with Bembo and in opposition to Trissino, rejects the introduction of the Greek letters 'epsilon' and 'omega', because the Italian language would have lost the clarity and simplicity it had inherited from Latin.

⁵ As Küenzlen notes, *L'asino d'oro* was the last Firenzuola work prepared and funded by Gerolamo. Does this mean he did not consider it to be his brother's most important work? Did he fear censorship?

⁶ See Tonia Caterina Riviello, ch. 1, 'Agnolo Firenzuola and the intellectual life (early 16th century)' in *Agnolo Firenzuola: The Androgynous Vision* (Rome 1986).

⁷ This is not entirely true; Firenzuola also mentions his own life events – in particular the death of his beloved Costanza Amaretta – at the beginning of another book, written at the same time as *L'asino d'oro: I Ragionamenti*.

poichè, quelle che in nessuno altro suo componimento non avea più fatto, volle, nel principio di questa sua fatica, fare brevemente memoria della vita sua: la quella fu sempre virtuosa & honorata, benche poco lieta e infelice.⁸

We find a second example of unproblematic reception of this most interesting aspect of Firenzuola's adaptation in the same letter. Lorenzo Scala explains that Ludovico Domenichini, another author and friend of Firenzuola's, replaced missing pages in *L'asino d'oro* with passages of his own:

Vero è, che in questa traduzione s'è trovato mancare alcune carte in diversi luogi, ne si sa à per cui difetto, le quali d'all' eccellente & mio molto virtuoso amico Messer Lodovico Domenichini ci sono state supplite, per la grande affezione, che la virtù sua porta al valor di lui. Dove s'è talmente adoperato, che avendo egli molta pratica delle cose del Firenzuola, l'ha così ben imitato, che lo stile dell'uno non è punto differente dall' altro.⁹

Indeed, as contemporary critics have shown,¹⁰ Domenichini borrowed several passages from Boiardo's translation to complete gaps in *L'asino d'oro* (mainly in book 10). But he also added something of his own to the first book: praise of Firenzuola's father, Sebastiano, who was a lawyer and humanist scholar. This interpolation suggests that the substitution of Agnolo for Lucius did not raise any questions in Firenzuola's circle. We may assume that contemporary readers interpreted it as a statement of authorship, probably linked to the use of Italian, at a time when the dignity of vulgar language was being reclaimed. Firenzuola, who sees himself as a successor to Boccaccio and Petrarch, friend of Pietro Bembo and Pietro Aretino, replaces Lucius because his

⁸ 'So here is the translation of Apuleius that he [Firenzuola] wrote, with all that is suitable for a similar undertaking; that is to say, [a translation] that is clearly understood, presented in an appropriate manner, with pure, correct words, full of meaning in our language, with properly executed stylistic devices – in short, all that was needed to gain honour and satisfy others. And [Firenzuola] clearly showed that he had approved it, because, unlike in any of his other works, at the beginning of this one, he wrote a short tale of his life, which was always virtuous and honourable, though sad and miserable.' (unpaginated)

⁹ 'It is true that a few pages were found to be missing from this translation, we don't know how, and that they were replaced by the excellent Lodovico Domenichini, my very virtuous friend, due to the great affection that his virtue brings to the value [of Firenzuola]. And he did it so well, having had much practice with the works of Firenzuola, that one cannot distinguish the style of one from the other.'

¹⁰ A. D. Scaglione, 'L'asino d'oro e il Firenzuola', *Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana* (1949) 230-31.

translation to Italian makes him as worthy as Apuleius. In Scala's view, Firenzuola's linguistic choices (in favour of the purity of the Italian language) and the autobiographical adaptation are probably part of the same agenda. Indeed, Firenzuola's proper name refers to a place and recalls the author's familial roots in Florence, as well as his close relationship with the Tuscan language:

Firenzuola, posta appiè dell'Alpi, che sono già tra Firenze, e Bologna, è picciolo castello, ma come il nome, e le sue insegne dimostrano nobilitato, e tenuto caro de' suoi signori; e Fiorenza medesima sino la mia antica patria.... Io principio adunque una Tosca favola.¹¹

Apuleius' text triggers a complex identification between high opinions of vulgar language, praise of a city, pride in a lineage, allegiance to the Medicis (repeatedly affirmed), and the metaphorical portrait of a young and promising author who, as we shall see, stages and dramatizes his literary vocation.

For all these reasons, Firenzuola's autobiographical appropriation of the *Metamorphoses* is no mere interpolation. Instead, it entails a deep transformation of the entire text. I shall scrutinize some of the elements of this transformation, akin to a modernization, Italianization, and moderate Christianization. I will also try to pinpoint what is at stake in this translation-adaptation of the *Metamorphoses*.

II) Modalities of modernization

a) Places, names, and customs

In the Tuscan fable written by Firenzuola, all the names of people and places are modern and Italian. Contrary to his other works (for instance a pastoral prayer imitating antique religious ceremonies),¹² Firenzuola's *L'asino d'oro* does not in the least try to revive the Latin world; without any care for geographical coherence, Thessaly is replaced by Naples, Corinth by Florence, Athens by Siena, Aetolia by Bologna. According to Küenzlen, the choice of Bologna (and not Naples, which was allegedly a city devoted

¹¹ 'Firenzuola, at the foot of the Alps, between Florence and Bologna, is a small castle, but as its name and its titles indicate, noble and popular among its lords; and Florence is the homeland of my ancestors. I am therefore beginning a Tuscan fable.'

¹² I am referring to the 'Sacrificio pastorale' by Agnolo Firenzuola (1540).

to sorcery) can be explained by the fact that Bolognese faculty of law were famous; and, as we shall see, Firenzuola equates studying law with being an ass. In Firenzuola's translation-adaptation, Photis is Lucia (translation of the Greek 'Photis'), Phytoas is Francesco, and Byrrhena is Laura, which is also the name of Firenzuola's actual aunt. It therefore seems that Firenzuola does not penetrate the world of the *Metamorphoses* alone; he disguises several historical figures, family, and friends in fictional but unantiquated clothing. Indeed, Firenzuola does not limit the modernization of the antique world to onomastic changes; he accurately transforms all the elements of daily life and customs, leaving no record and almost no trace of antiquity. Among many examples (concerning clothes, dishes, and money),¹³ Agnolo and Lucia, unlike Lucius and Photis, no longer mix their wine with warm water (book 2). Every mention of gladiator fights is removed. But the best example of this meticulous modernization is the replacement of a pyrrhic dance (in book 10) by a dance described in detailed, technical terms, which seems to have been borrowed from one of the dance treatises of the Renaissance:

Egli fu ordinato un bellissimo e ornato ballo [...] : Quelle volte preste, quei salti leggeri, quelle capriollette minute, quelle ripresse nette, quelle scempi tardetti, quei doppi fugaci, quelle gravi continenze, quelle umile riverenza, e cosi a tempo, che' pareva, che ogni lor movimento fosse degli intrumenti medesimi... (1553, 315-316)¹⁴

Firenzuola, who wrote a treatise in 1541 about feminine beauty,¹⁵ expresses a court ideal of gracefulness and decorum in this passage, close to that of Castiglione (whom he probably knew during his stay in Rome).

b) Christianization and anti-Semitism

Modern customs necessarily include Christian civilization. Firenzuola, who never expressed any devout thoughts in his writings, seems to have been a moderate Christian,

¹³ F. Küenzlen gives many examples of these changes, *op. cit.*, 349-350.

¹⁴ 'A very beautiful ball was organized [...] these rapid spins, these light jumps, these little cabrioles, these clean pick-ups, these slow steps, these quick pas de deux, these serious countenances, these humble bows, and all this so much in time, that it seems each movement comes from the instruments themselves.'

¹⁵ *Celso o Delle Bellezze delle Donne*, written in Prato.

though perhaps at odds with ecclesiastical authorities. He converts the *Metamorphoses* into a modern but not entirely Catholic tale; his Christianization of the Pagan world is limited. In Firenzuola's version, for example, a beggar asking for money at a crossroads begs in front of churches (34). More significantly, the traditional allegory of Isis as the Virgin (by Filippo Beroaldo in 1500 and Guillaume de Tours in 1517) is missing, because Firenzuola almost entirely removes the last chapter of the *Metamorphoses*. The ass returns to human form without the help of any goddess – pagan or Christian – but instead through the mediation of an earthly woman, Costanza Amaretta. The final metamorphosis and return to human form do, however, involve a priest who purifies and blesses the ass in a church. Costanza Amaretta, who is accompanied by a little boy (sitting astride the ass, perhaps as Christ entered into Jerusalem) may also be a reference to the Virgin. Whatever the case, religious commentary is remarkably understated in this text.

Religious modernization of Apuleius' novel is also noticeable in anti-Semitic statements. Contemporary critics have never noticed these elements, perhaps because they are unpleasant. They are nevertheless part of the modernization of the text and of its satirical and even referential dimension. The first example consists of the transformation of the physician and his wife into a Jewish couple (book 10, the story of the female poisoner). The second and most significant example is a satirical development also found in book 10. The ass' target is a certain Martino Spinosa, allegedly one of the author's enemies. The ass alludes to an ecclesiastical condemnation that contemporary critics never clarify (nor understand).¹⁶ He also criticizes the Italian reception of Spanish people banned for religious reasons – that is to say, Jews or descendants of Jewish families:

Ne possò tacere il giudicio di Martino Spinosa nella Romana ruota de' primi avvolgitori, il quale, corroto da alto favore, dandomi contro ad ogni giustizia e equità una sentenza e domantado con cagione, non arrossì almeno di dire : perchè mi è piaciuto. Ma glieli perdonato, poscia che egli è Spagnulo di quelli, a cui per atto di religione e interdetto lo stare in Ispagna, né biasmiamo questo paese, come facciamo, anzi dogliamoci di noi, che come una sentina, e come une asilo

¹⁶ On the contrary, Delmo Maestri obviously misunderstood this passage in his critical edition of Firenzuola's works in 1977.

riceviamo la feccia, e la ribalderia del mondo, e gli facciamo seder nelle catedre, e chiamiangli maestri. (1553, 321).¹⁷

Besides this anti-Semitic charge, it would perhaps be of interest to know the consequences of the aforementioned condemnation upon Firenzuola's life and career. Is it linked to the relinquishment of his religious status? Either way, this example demonstrates that the work's autobiographical dimension is not limited to a brief summary of the author's genealogy at the beginning of the work (as Scala claims in his dedicatory letter); autobiography and modernization pervade the whole adaptation, and they are inherent to its intent and meaning.

III) The stakes of autobiographical appropriation

a) From Christian to personal allegory

The replacement of Lucius by Agnolo is explicit, steady, and repeated; the other characters, Lucia and Laura (themselves substitutes for Photis and Byrrhena), frequently hail or address him using the name 'Agnolo'. The table of contents, in the 1550 edition, introduces the third book in these terms: 'Presa del Firenzuola. Accusa contra l'autore. Risposta dell'autore. [...] Il Firenzuola divenuto asino. Il Firenzuola Asino è bastonato dal proprio famiglio' ('Capture of Firenzuola. Accusation of the author. The author's response. [...] Firenzuola turned into an ass. Firenzuola, the Ass, is beaten by his own servant.'). The end of the story is summed up as: 'Agnolo ritornato d'Asino nella propria forma' ('Agnolo returns from the Ass to his original form'). The identification between the character and the author (by the author himself, as well as the editor of his work) is complete. Yet this uncanny substitution has never really been interpreted; when it has, it has been as a self-affirmation of Firenzuola as the author, rather than simply the translator, as I previously stated. This is, for example, an interpretation

¹⁷ 'I cannot remain silent about Martino Spinosa's judgment at the Roman Rota tribunal, a first-rate swindler, who, corrupted by favours from up high, pronounced a sentence against me, contrary to justice and fairness, and when I asked him why, he was unembarrassed to say: "because it pleased me". But I forgive him for it, because he is a Spaniard, among those who do not have the right to remain in Spain, for religious reasons; and instead of blaming this country, as we do, let us rather complain about ourselves, who, like a stream and a refuge, receive the litter and scoundrels of the world, whom we allow to sit in professorial chairs and whom we call masters.'

developed by Teoli, in his late edition of this work, in 1863.¹⁸ His interpretation is plausible, because it fits with the status of translation in Renaissance Italy. Moreover, his interpretation can be corroborated by the emphasis Firenzuola places upon aesthetic and auto-referential statements. For instance, he develops an ekphrasis of the statues of Diana and Acteon (in the second book), as well as the account of the prophecy that forecasts the literary fame of the narrator.

Moreover, the metamorphosis, as Firenzuola explicitly interprets it, is the story of a literary and amorous education. At the beginning and the end of *L'asino d'oro*, Firenzuola explains that the shape of an ass symbolizes the years spent studying law and practicing the function of lawyer (as Firenzuola actually did at the tribunal of the Curia). Studying and practicing poetry, however, under the amorous authority of a beloved woman (Costanza Amaretta), is akin to becoming a man from a platonic perspective – that is to say, reaching a superior state of self-consciousness through love and artistic creativity.

Questa fu quella Constanza, a laquella fattosi signora dell'anima, svegliò l'ingegno a quelli lodevoli esercizi, che me hanno fra i virtuosi fatto capere. Questa fu quella che trattomi dell'asinino studio delle leggi civili, anzi incivili, mi fece applicare alle umane lettere (1553, 323)¹⁹

This change of vocation from law to literature recalls Ovid's biography, as he recounts in *Tristia*. But in Firenzuola's text, it is not only a literary reference. It refers to his dedication to poetry and the consequences it has had for him: leaving Rome, the papal court, and later his religious identity (including ecclesiastical benefits at the end of his life). Firenzuola stages his choice of vocation. At the beginning of *I Ragionamenti* (an unfinished work modelled off of the *Decameron*, in which Costanza Amaretta is the main character), he explains that he wrote his first works after Costanza's death, following her last wishes. In the last book of *L'asino d'oro*, Firenzuola also mentions Costanza's death, presented as the starting point and incentive for his literary vocation. This woman, real

¹⁸ *L'asino d'oro di Lucio Apuleio; volga rizzato da Agnolo Firenzuola; con l'aggiunta della Novella dello sternuto tradotta da Matteo Boiardo* (Milan 1863). Marco Teoli writes the introduction.

¹⁹ 'And it was this Costanza, who, having become mistress of my soul, awoke my mind to these commendable exercises, which allowed me to become part of those who distinguish themselves in them. It was she who pulled me back from idiotic studies of civil, or rather uncivil, law, and made me dedicate myself to letters and humanities.'

or imagined (one critic expresses doubts about her historical identity,²⁰ but she is presented as a referential character), is based on the model of Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura. The metamorphosis through art and love has to be understood as a general and exemplary programme of humanist and courtly education.

Firenzuola also touches upon a more traditional interpretation of the metamorphosis from human to animal form (and vice versa); it can be seen as standing for the passage from a licentious to a virtuous life, respectively embodied by Lucia and Costanza, sensual and virtuous love, according to Marsilio Ficino's lesson. But the sexual licence symbolized by the donkey also corresponds to the priesthood period of Firenzuola's life. The way in which he applies the Apuleius fable to his own life is therefore potentially scandalous – no wonder that it was never published while the author was living. One may also think that the use of an autobiographical first person, in a narrative talking about a magical operation and monstrous coupling, is a tricky endeavour. However, the editions of *L'asino d'oro* that are released after Firenzuola's death, even expurgated,²¹ demonstrate that the work is not considered to exceed the limits of propriety.

Indeed, its ultimate interpretation depends on the status of the first person, along with the multiple choices available to the reader between an allegorical and literal reading.

Following our line of analysis, the suggested and appropriate reading of *L'asino d'oro* is neither allegorical, in the traditional, religious sense of the term, nor literal. Between the three traceable positions on the *Metamorphoses* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – religious allegory (Beroaldo), entertainment with poor moral meaning (Louveau, Addlington), and a literal reading based on demonological thinking (Bodin, Montlyard) – Firenzuola's represents a completely original, hermeneutical view. Identifying himself with Lucius makes the three previously mentioned attitudes nonsensical. Since paganism is erased from his modernized world, any metaphorical consistency with Catholicism becomes pointless. Since personal reference is involved, this piece of fiction cannot be reduced to meaningless trifles. Finally, since Firenzuola,

²⁰ Such is Adriano Seroni's claim in his introduction to Firenzuola's works (*Opere*, coll. 'I classici italiani' (Florence 1958).

²¹ In later editions (1598 and 1603, Giunti, Florence), erotic passages are softened.

contrary to Apuleius, cannot be taxed with sorcery, the metamorphoses and magical phenomena described in the book are merely fictional.

The status of the first person is, therefore, rather complex. As in many sixteenth century works, it is partly referential, or, rather, intermittently referential. This is clearly suggested in the table of contents, in which the narrator is called 'The author', 'Agnolo', 'Firenzuola', and sometimes 'l'asino'; under these circumstances, he is probably only, or almost only, a fictional character. The reader is invited to interpret this as a direct reference at times (when the narrator talks about his genealogy or Costanza Amaretta) and a loose one at others. The identification of the author with the main character of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* may also function as a model and exemplification of the act of reading; every reader can imagine himself or herself as the protagonist, through a thought experiment that is precisely the point of fiction. The broad symbolism of the ass in the Renaissance (ignorance, sin, sexual licence, concealed wisdom) allows for a multiplicity of applications, lending itself to the diversity of the audience.

To conclude, there are different ways, based on varying perspectives, of understanding Firenzuola's highly unique work.²²

Firstly, in the framework of the history of translation (as linked to an affirmation of the Italian language and an appropriation of antiquity), this text emphasizes the status of translator as author. But this substitution is only possible in a culture dominated by paradoxes and a tradition of comical first-person narrative, as with Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, and *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

Firenzuola's adaptation is thus also part of a history of first-person narrative. The status of the first person is complex in this text, as well as others texts of the same period, because it is simultaneously referential, inter-textual, and fictional. The same goes for the character of Costanza Amaretta, who belongs to different ontological spaces, both inside and outside of fiction. Such a combination is no longer possible by the seventeenth century.

Lastly, this work can be understood within a general history of fictionality. From a narratological perspective, Firenzuola performs a kind of metalepsis, breaching a

²² Pompeo Vizzani did publish a translation of the *Metamorphoses* in 1607 in which he drew a parallel between Lucius' story and his own life, but he did not replace Lucius by a character named Pompeo Vizzani. This translation, issued for the first time in Bologna in 1607, was published several times in Venice (1629, 1644, 1662, and 1704).

narrative sphere in introducing himself, author-translator, into a work of fiction.²³ But this transgression is mitigated, since Firenzuola completely transforms the antique world into a Renaissance setting. This liberty is characteristic of fiction before the seventeenth century and after the nineteenth century. To draw a contemporary parallel, today's internet users and young authors of fan fiction are prone to include a counterpart of themselves in the action. In some ways, Firenzuola's unique gesture bears some resemblance to ancient and modern modes of self-representation, but it goes further, as the translator here assumes the role of author *and* main character.

Firenzuola's translation-adaptation should therefore be understood in the context of the Renaissance affirmation of authorship, a sophisticated (though temporary) use of the first person, the free appropriation of antique texts for contemporary and even personal purposes, and lastly, the development of a consciousness of fictionality and a diversification of the uses of fiction.

²³ For an updated definition of metalepsis, see John Pier: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/metalepsis-revised-version-uploaded-13-july-2016>.