


Only during the past twenty years have Anglo-Saxon critics and literary historians begun to devote serious attention to the regular comedy of classical inspiration that flourished in western Europe (particularly in Italy and France) throughout the sixteenth century. Whether for aristocratic circles at state events like a marriage of political alliance or for a middle-class gathering of merchant families at carnival time, regular comedy played a major social role. Among the writers of erudite comedy are to be found leading figures like Machiavelli, Ariosto, Aretino, and Giordano Bruno. Some of the artists who designed stage settings or costumes for performances of those classicizing comedies included Raphael, Giulio Romano, Vasari, and Bronzino. While the very number of comedies written and actually presented before audiences during the sixteenth century appears statistically impressive, it is unfortunate that few have enjoyed translation into English. To address that need the Centre for Renaissance Studies and Research at Carleton University has initiated a publication series for colloquial English versions of continental Renaissance plays. Annibal Caro’s *Gli Straccioni* of 1543, Giovan Maria Cecchi’s *L’Assiuolo* of 1549, and Odet de Turnèbe’s *Les Contens* of 1577–1581 are the first works to appear in translation for the Carleton Renaissance series.

All three plays demonstrate the main characteristics of “*commedia erudita*”: division into five acts, faithful observation of the unities of time and place. That careful adherence to ancient classical conventions came about from a half-century of humanistic research and experimentation during the latter part of the fifteenth century, especially following the recovery of twelve unknown Plautine comedies by Nicholas Cusanus. The fact that these three comedies contain intricate multiple plots rather than the single plot action recommended by Aristotle in his *Poetics* reflects a
Renaissance preference for complication and variety of episodes, as advocated by the literary theorist Giambattista Giraldi Cintio in his Discorso Intorno Al Comporre Delle Commedie e Delle Tragedie of 1545. None of the three plays that are here being published in English translation in their entirety for the first time has a plot closely modelled on that of an ancient play or displays the process of contaminatio whereby a modern author weaves together plot elements from two or more Plautine or Terentian comedies. To acquaint present-day readers with the conventions and traditions of erudite comedy, the translators provide critical introductions on the lives of the dramatists, the sources for their plays in contemporary events and narratives like romances and novelle, and the chief linguistic characteristics of the original plays.

In translating the title of Annibal Caro's Gli Straccion, Massimo Ciavolella and Donald Beecher have suggested The Scruffy Scoundrels while Marvin T. Herrick in his Italian Comedy in the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960) used (p. 145) The Ragged Rascals. Since the title characters Giovanni and Battista are neither scoundrels nor rascals, perhaps the most accurate rendering would be the "ragged brothers" to designate this Tweedledum and Tweedledee pair of eccentrics. Konrad Eisenbichler quite accurately and cleverly adds the adjective "homed" to the "owl" in the title of Cecchi's comedy so as to anticipate the cuckoldry reigning at the drama's close. In order to express the idea of a social round of eventually-satisfied expectations, Donald Beecher's title Satisfaction All Around describes the carnival season contentment of the play's main characters in realizing their erotic, marital, and social ambitions.

Since all three plays exist only in prose originals, the translators have not had to resort to inventing verse equivalents for Italian or French metric forms. Yet the task that the translators have had to assume in presenting the plays in easily readable (and performable) English versions must necessarily challenge their linguistic resourcefulness. For all three plays the translators have added some stage directions to indicate the location of characters on the unchanging stage set as they hide behind corners or carts to eavesdrop on the conversations of rivals and adversaries. Sometimes dashes are employed to designate monologues and asides. With the Straccion the translators were dealing with a comedy whose fame during the Renaissance rested on its eloquent Tuscanizing style rather than its theatrical effectiveness as the play never received a performance. The English version rarely succeeds in conveying the variety of literary styles that the translators describe in their introduction: exaggerated indignation from the scruffy brothers, outbursts of amorous melancholy by the hero Tindaro, the convoluted speeches of the protagonist's companion Demetrio on the obligation of friendship, the irrational demands of the madman Mirandola, the conspiratorial conversations of scheming servants intent on robbing their masters, and the carefully reasoned discourse of the attorney Messer Rossello who ends the disputes by enforcing the justice promised to all Romans by the Farnese Pope Paul III. Eisenbichler has to confront one of the most linguistically gifted writers of the Florentine idiom, for it was the language of Cecchi's plays that eventually rescued him from literary oblivion early in the nineteenth century. Cecchi knew the language of his home city so well that he even wrote a Dichiarazione Dei Proverbi where he listed and explained sixty-four Tuscan proverbial expressions. Salacious double entendres, scurrilous expletives, pompous speeches by Latin-spouting attorneys, unctuous appeals for funds by a falsely pious bawd figure among the challenges that a translator of L'Assiulolo must
overcome. Eisenbichler’s success in reworking Cecchi’s prose becomes apparent in Act II, Sc. iv, with the linguistically underplayed irony in the monologue by the Pisan youth Rinuccio who praises the assistance of his friend Giulio in an amorous exploit while not realizing that both youths love the same woman. In order to render the frequently contentious idiom of bourgeois French society at the close of the sixteenth century, Beecher has had to preserve a great deal of the lengthy and intricate syntax of the original prose of _Les Contes_. The florid amatory language of the youth Basile in the third scene of the French play’s fifth act reveals his extravagantly passionate character as he appeals to marry the girl Geneviève whose honor he compromised by seducing her. All the translators strive to use a modern literary style without any cumbersome jargon, quaint diction, or the dubious substitution of a dialect like cockney for lower class speech. As some of the translators note in their introductions, their goal has been to produce versions that might one day receive performance.

Because translation deprives a literary work of its local linguistic flavor, anyone attempting to write a version of a play in a different language has to stress the setting so as not to lose a sense of place. Ciavolella and Beecher devote a large portion of their introduction to describing the era and locale of _Gli Straccioni_ in Rome during the Catholic Reformation under Pope Paul III and the Farnese dynasty. Since Caro worked in service to that illustrious Roman family, the intention of his drama is to proclaim the moral renewal and end of decadence along with an extensive urban reconstruction plan as part of the Farnese program to assert the city’s role as spiritual leader of nations. In the comedy itself characters returning home after years of captivity among the Moors find themselves bewildered by the loss of familiar landmarks and their substitution by new sturctures. The translators might have compared this drama to other contemporary plays of Roman life: Aretino’s two comedies _La Cortigiana_ (with Rome as a centre of ceaseless intrigue) and _Talanta_ (that looks back upon the city’s ancient monuments) as well as Bibbiena’s _Calandria_ with its picture of Rome as a town of diminished grandeur. In Caro’s political portrait Rome possesses an ambivalence as the site of impoverishment and any imaginable act of insanity by arrogant aristocrats or as a place of refuge and justice for the oppressed seeking papal charity.

In the introduction of _The Horned Owl_ Eisenbichler remarks on the way Cecchi followed Machiavelli’s example in the _Mandragola_ by including a church as part of the stage setting and making it a place of assignation for bawds and their lecherous clients. Although the setting of _L’Assiulo_ is Pisa, the drama’s mercantile world where a woman’s body is discussed as an article of commercial exchange expresses the bourgeois values of Cecchi’s native Florence. For Eisenbichler the society in _L’Assiulo_ is one inviting constant deception and meriting adulterous exploitation. In comparing Cecchi’s comedy with Machiavelli’s theatrical masterwork the translator does not note how in the _Mandragola_ a stable new social order based on genuine love will emerge in the near future when the adulterous hero Callimaco marries Madonna Lucrezia upon the death of her much older husband Messer Nicia. Cecchi’s dramatic vision does not look beyond a carnival game of masquerades and ruses (beffe) that his selfish characters play upon each other. Neither in the introduction nor in the notes does there appear any mention of the play’s Goliard background, for the youths Giulio and Rinuccio are students at the University of Pisa. Like Ariosto’s incomplete final comedy _I Studenti_, this drama participates in the tradition of humanistic plays in Latin
about the amorous exploits of young scholars who neglect their studies in order to pursue erotic conquests. In the present English version the translator chooses to focus upon the atmosphere of corruption that undermines spiritual and domestic authority.

While Cecchi wrote over sixty theatrical pieces, Odet de Turnèbe finished only one play at the time of his death in 1581 at the age of twenty-eight. Although the French author faithfully observed all the conventions of the Italian erudite comedy, Beecher stresses how *Les Contens* proves to be a supremely Parisian play. In this comedy of intrigue, character, and manners Turnèbe achieves a satire of the French bourgeoisie with their preoccupation for amassing wealth, reducing the institution of marriage to a venal transaction, and upholding honour as a mask for hypocrisy. In both the introduction and notes Beecher draws the reader’s attention to the time of action during winter at the carnival season with the frequent comments and complaints of the characters about cold weather and the fear of plague. Parisian landmarks and neighborhoods appear repeatedly in the dialogue to create a sense of environment for greedy merchants, socially ambitious parents, and treacherous panders of erotic contentment. Not only does Turnèbe adhere strictly to the unity of place, but he also holds his play’s duration to a time period of little more than twelve hours with constant references to various daily religious services, mealtimes, and the tolling of bells to mark the narrow temporal confines of this heavily condensed drama. In time and setting *Les Contens* appears as an urban comedy where the conflicting values of romance and commerce contend for dominance.

Through their range of characters the three comedies contain a combination of modern figures with traditional types only slightly modified from their models in Plautus and Terence. Although the ragged brothers of Caro’s play represent the blocking generation who caused the young couple Giulietta and Tindaro to flee the island of Chios and suffer a long series of misadventures, Giovanni and Battista are involved as enraged litigants in a court battle to recover a fortune; and upon their success in the legal dispute they bless the newly reunited lovers and provide a generous dowry. In the character of the just recently repatriated Roman nobleman Giordano Cortesi (whose name the translators misleadingly anglicize as Jordano) Caro intended to portray the imperious aristocrats who resisted the judicial reforms of the Farnese papacy. Whereas ancient comedies usually presented wily servants who aided young lovers in their struggle to overcome parental obstructions, Ciavolella and Beecher note in the introduction how the servants in *Gli Straccioni* like Marabeo and Pilucca reflect the moral corruption of Rome as they seek to defraud their masters. In opposition to Giordano’s arrogance and the servants’ debasement the playwright sets Messer Rossello, not the usual pedantic Latin-mouthing lawyer of Renaissance comedies but the eloquent advocate of Vatican reform. To create a drama that glorifies the physical and political reconstruction of Rome, Caro was fashioning a type of play that became popular in the second half of the sixteenth century: romantic comedy. As the source for the romantic intrigue the author turned to Achilles Tatius’ Byzantine tale *Leucippe and Cleitophon*, transferring events to the embattled environment of a Rome caught between warring noble families. Since Caro wished to celebrate the renewal of society through marriage, his drama concludes with the wedding festivities of Tindaro and Giulietta along with the joyous reunion of a by-now-restrained Giordano with his wife Argentina. To signify a break with an unhappy and unjust past the brothers Giovanni and Battista have cast off their rags to
assume the attire appropriate to their social rank. Even the dishonest servants participate in the spirit of reconciliation as their masters forgive earlier offenses. All classes share in the new order established by Pope Paul III.

In contrast to Caro’s celebration of family reunion and marriage, Cecchi expressly states in the prologue to L’Assiulo that his comedy will not result in weddings or discoveries of long-lost children. Amorous frenzy, vanity, venal calculation, and the desire to deceive others motivate the characters in his drama of adultery, whose inspiration in the illicit love stories of the Decameron is thoroughly documented by Eisenbichler. The translator in particular discusses the hypocrisy of the Boccaccian derived bawd Monna Verdana in the attempt of this falsely pious woman to manipulate to financial advantage the senile passion of the pretentious attorney Ambrogio. One of the comic devices that might have merited critical attention is that of disguise (especially transvestite disguise) which Cecchi deliberately fused with the theme of masquerade since his drama takes place during carnival season. The servants here recall their antecedents in ancient comedy, showing themselves to be either a ridiculous bungler like Ambrogio’s valet Giannella or a brilliant strategist like Giulio’s attendant Giorgetto. In his portrayal of erotic relationships Cecchi breaks with both the ancient Roman tradition of respecting the family as an institution and with Boccaccio’s ethic of a loving commitment between two persons. For here the drama leads to a four-fold romantic exchange between Giulio and Rinuccio with Ambrogio’s wife Oretta and her sister Violante. With considerable insight the translator comments that the society emerging at this comedy’s close appears as a disquieting one based on ever-continuing subterfuge.

Even though Les Contes recognizes a moment for disguise, seduction and adultery, Turnèbe’s play ultimately propels its classically portrayed characters toward a conclusion in reconciliation and marriage. As Beecher convincingly demonstrates (pp. xxxiii–xxiv), the characters deceive themselves by confusing honour with ambition and a sense of self-importance. Mme Louise almost wrecks her family’s reputation by rejecting young Basile’s honorable request to marry her daughter Geneviève and thus forcing him to seduce the girl. The stubbornly authoritarian mother refuses to perceive the cynical opportunism of her favorite marital candidate: the youth Eustache, who prefers the advantages of an adulterous relationship to the material rewards of a wedding arranged by his father Girard. Nor does Louise’s attitude permit her to see the obvious cowardice of still another suitor: Captain Rodomont, whom Turnèbe adapted from the strutting braggart warriors of Plautus and Terence while making him into an impoverished fugitive from angry creditors. Louise’s moral blindness becomes the pivotal motif for the drama’s structure. All the satellite characters take part in the intrigue culminating in Geneviève’s marriage to Basile. Like Verdana in L’Assiulo, the bawd Françoise makes her meretricious activities with a pretence of religious devotion. While Basile’s avaricious servant and Snefego skillfully promotes his master’s amorous exploits, Eustache’s scatter-brained lackey Gentilly cannot even convey a simple message. Although Rodomont’s attendant Nivellet tries to fool himself about his master’s dubious valor, this servant still faithfully shares the captain’s misery. Turnèbe joins the ravenous hunger of the classical parasite to the exploitative greed of the pander in the corrupt character Saucisson, who accepts Eustache’s hospitality as partial payment for procuring for the youth the favors of the debauched Dame Alix. Every appetite finds its final satisfaction with Louise’s
invitation to the wedding banquet that marks the drama's honourable close.

General readers as well as specialists in theatre owe a debt of gratitude to the editors and translators in the Carleton Renaissance Plays Series. Except for occasional mistakes of fact in the introduction and notes about some Italian landmarks and novelistic character sources, the texts provide informative introductions to authors and works that deserve to be well-known. One can hope that these pioneering efforts at translation will lead to actual performances. Every admirer of Renaissance theatre should look forward with eagerness to the plays that will be appearing in this series.

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Like the lives of Edward V and Edward VI, other royal children cut off at an early age, that of Prince Henry, eldest son of James I and Anne of Denmark, transports us into a world of speculative fantasies. Dead at eighteen in 1612, he carried with him the hopes of those who yearned for a stalwart ninth to add to the list of eight English Henries—an event forlornly achieved (though Professor Williamson's tale does not stretch so far) with the pathetic assumption of that title, in Rome at the tail-end of the Stuart dynasty's fortunes, by Cardinal Henry, Bonnie Prince Charlie's younger brother. Henry IX was to be an unlucky designation; and the Tudor Harry's ghost might well have chuckled.

As the author is concerned to show at length, the Prince of Wales was from birth the centre of some fairly continuous mythologizing; the process of attempting to shape a ruler's personality, his course of action and future destiny, is the end to which the chapters of this study are devoted.

A compact book treating a quite brief life, this illustrated study attempts something relatively different from the usual kind of biography. The impulse to this kind of work comes from at least three sources: not only biography, but literary criticism and iconographic studies as well. As the subtitle makes clear, it has affinities, first, with recent work like Stephen J. Greenblatt's Sir Walter Ralegh: The Renaissance Man and His Roles and his Renaissance Self-Fashioning: More to Shakespeare, in which a life is conceived as a series of conscious iconic gestures, "speaking pictures" dramatizing the symbolic roles the protagonist elects for himself from the welter of experience and turns to meaningful dramatic account: life made artful, we might say, by an italicization of the moment. Beyond that, this study reveals the influence of twentieth-century criticism of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama (J. Leeds Barroll and John Doebler are recent examples) in which the chief actors are seen to assume attitudes and postures that suddenly, by a kind of freezing into emblem, confer upon their actions a universal, idealized significance, a convention exploited particularly, as Professor Orgel has shown, in the masques of the Stuart court. And most important of all, of course, this study follows in the steps of art-historians like Roy Strong and Frances A. Yates on the symbolic lives in literature and art of Elizabeth I, Prince Henry's godmother. In general, however, Professor Williamson's work, though