

By Ali Mills (MA 2006)

*La Vie de Scaramouche*

*La Vie de Scaramouche* written by Angelo Costantini, is the story of famed Italian comedian Tiberio Fiorilli and was first printed in March, 1695. In this short life and times, dedicated to *Son Altesse Royale*, the author paints a colorful picture of the beloved court comedian. Costantini recreated the life of Fiorilli and his persona, Scaramouche, in this double biography of the man and the myth.

These memoirs allow a glimpse into life at the court of Louis XIV. For example, chapter twenty-six describes what is needed to act out an Italian comedy. Besides the character types that must be present, one needs a yearly pension. Costantini offers numerous accounts of how Scaramouche was able to obtain more money than his contract allowed. Chapter twenty-eight provides a physical description of the man, making note of his body, its shape and agility, as well as his personality. Costantini also notes that the great Molière studied with Scaramouche and attributed the grace and grimaces of his own acting to the Italian actor.

Among many humorous events, chapter nineteen recounts Scaramouche returning home with a pie. Upon his return, he places the pie on top of his head so that he can unlock the door. As he does so, the pie breaks through the bottom and encircles his neck. To the delight of all present at his home, he is left standing at the door with sauce running down his face. This anecdote is characteristic of both the man and the player. It is said in the final chapter that he was the “plus illustre Comedien qui ait jamais paru sur le Théâtre Italien; et l'on peut dire sans hyperbole, que la nature après l'avoir fait en cassa le moule” (145). In other words, there was no other like him at the time of his playing, and in the author's opinion, there never would be.

The first edition, printed in Paris in 1695, includes a letter of permission to print from Versailles granting Costantini the right to have his book printed and sold for a period of eight years. This edition includes a frontispiece with an engraving of Scaramouche created by the artist Nicolas Bonnart. The player is posing proudly in a garden with right hand extended, holding his guitar in his left hand, and looking upon his audience. Our 1699 edition, presented here, was printed in Brussels. It also has a frontispiece but makes no indication of the artist. The image is a different representation of the actor, who holds his guitar in his right hand, his hat in his left, and stands on an empty stage. This edition deviates only slightly from the original text.

This book was popular enough in its day to be translated into English and printed in October of the following year. The frontispiece of the translation, signed by the Dutch engraver Frederik Hendrik Van Den Hove, is similar to that of the Brussels edition, but this too seems to be a translation of sorts. The book's author, A.R., has chosen to dedicate his version to the Honorable Charles Boyle, Esquire, and does not translate the dedication to her Royal Highness. While the translation does record a version of the preface, it lacks not just a record of the dedicatory

Epistle, but contains no trace of Costantini's introduction, no poem containing the Eulogy, no Epitaph, and no Epigram. The translation follows the original fairly well, except for the occasional omission of an Italian or French phrase, or a different phraseology.